



HANS-GEORG GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

BEYOND MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

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Beyond Modernism and Postmodernism

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Abstract

The confrontation between modern and postmodern philosophical approaches is one of the most prominent and protracted academic debates of recent decades. In the philosophy of education, this debate has been ongoing since the 1980s and it continues to reverberate in contemporary discussions. One of the major themes of the debate is the endeavour of the modern philosophy of education to establish a universally valid rational foundation for educational theory and practice. This attempt has become a central target of criticism of the postmodern philosophies of education, which emphasize the contextual and situated nature of rationality and knowledge. As for the postmodern educational approaches, they have often been accused of giving rise to problematic forms of relativism. Rather than yielding fruitful solutions, the debate has largely resulted in an undesirable polarization between the modern and postmodern standpoints.

This thesis seeks to take part in the discussion concerning the modernism-postmodernism debate from the viewpoint of Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1900–2002) philosophical hermeneutics. The thesis consists of three interrelated studies that examine the relation of Gadamer's hermeneutics to some of the prominent representatives of modernism (Jürgen Habermas) and postmodernism (John Caputo and Richard Rorty) from different perspectives. The common aim of these studies is to demonstrate that Gadamer's philosophy is able to avoid some of the central philosophical problems and limitations associated with the aforementioned approaches and therefore it might also contribute to the movement beyond the unproductive modernism-postmodernism dichotomy in the philosophy of education.

The studies particularly focus on the Gadamerian concepts of dialogical rationality and the truth of the subject matter (*die Sache selbst*), which represent an attempt to redefine the modernist notions of rationality and truth from a historically situated and postfoundationalist perspective. It is suggested in the

thesis that through these concepts, Gadamer's hermeneutics can provide education with orienting ideals and principles for the philosophical critique of educational practices without jeopardizing the hermeneutical awareness of the historicity and contextuality of knowledge. Accordingly, on the basis of these concepts, Gadamer's philosophy circumvents both the foundationalist tendencies of the modern philosophies of education and the problems associated with such postmodern educational approaches that refrain from providing a justification for educational practices. Consequently, the study argues that Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by the modern and postmodern philosophies of education discussed in the thesis.

Keywords: Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics, the philosophy of education, modernism, postmodernism

Anniina Leiviskä

HANS-GEORG GADAMERIN FILOSOFINEN HERMENEUTIikka KASVATUSFILOSOFIASSA

Modernismin ja postmodernismin tuolle puolen

Tiivistelmä

Modernien ja postmodernien filosofisten näkökulmien välinen kiista on yksi viime vuosikymmenten näkyvimmistä ja pitkäkestoisimmista akateemisista erimielisyyksistä. Kasvatusfilosofiassa kyseinen kiista nousi esiin erityisesti 1980-luvulla ja se heijastuu edelleen nykyisiin keskusteluihin. Yksi kiistan pääteemoista on moderniin kasvatusfilosofiaan liittyvä pyrkimys löytää kasvatuksen teorialle ja käytännölle universaalisti pätevä rationaalinen perusta. Tämä pyrkimys nousi postmodernien kasvatusfilosofioiden keskeiseksi kritiikin kohteeksi, sillä postmodernissa ajattelussa korostetaan tiedon ja rationaalisuuden kontekstuaalista luonnetta. Postmoderneja kasvatusfilosofioita puolestaan on usein syytetty siitä, että ne johtavat ongelmallisiin relativismin muotoihin. Rakentavien ratkaisujen sijaan modernismin ja postmodernismin välinen kiista on enimmäkseen johtanut hedelmättömään vastakkainasetteluun näiden kasvatusfilosofisten lähestymistapojen välillä.

Tämä väitöskirja osallistuu modernismin ja postmodernismin välistä kiistaa koskevaan kasvatusfilosofiseen keskusteluun Hans-Georg Gadamerin (1900–2002) filosofisen hermeneutiikan näkökulmasta. Väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta toisiinsa liittyvästä osajulkaisusta, jotka tarkastelevat eri näkökulmista Gadamerin hermeneutiikan suhdetta modernismin (Jürgen Habermas) ja postmodernismin (John Caputo ja Richard Rorty) keskeisiin nykyedustajiin. Osajulkaisujen yhteisenä tavoitteena on osoittaa, että Gadamerin hermeneutiikka välttää joitakin edellä mainittuihin filosofioihin liitettyjä keskeisiä ongelmia ja rajoitteita, ja näin ollen se voi tarjota mahdollisuuksia myös modernien ja postmodernien kasvatusfilosofioiden välisen vastakkainasettelun ylittämiseen.

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan erityisesti Gadamerin dialogisen rationaalisuuden ja “asian itsensä” (*die Sache selbst*) käsitteitä, jotka voidaan nähdä pyrkimyksenä määritellä uudelleen modernismille ominaiset rationaalisuuden ja totuuden käsitteet postfundamentalismin ja historiallisuuden näkökulmista. Väitöskirjassa

osoitetaan, että näiden käsitteiden avulla Gadamerin hermeneutiikka voi tarjota suuntaavia ideaaleja kasvatukselle ja oppimiselle sekä perustan kasvatuksen käytänteitä koskevalle kritiikille, luopumatta kuitenkaan tiedon historiallisuutta ja kontekstisidonnaisuutta koskevista oletuksistaan. Näin ollen Gadamerin hermeneutiikka onnistuu välttämään sekä moderneille kasvatustilafilosofioille ominaisen epistemologisen fundamentalismin että postmoderneille kasvatustilafilosofioille tyyppilliset, kasvatuskäytänteiden oikeuttamiseen liittyvät ongelmat. Väitöskirjan johdopäätös on, että Gadamerin hermeneutiikka tarjoaa tutkimuksessa tarkasteltuja moderneja ja postmoderneja kasvatustilafilosofioita perustellumman lähtökohdan kasvatuksen teorialle ja käytännölle.

Asiasanat: Gadamer, filosofinen hermeneutiikka, kasvatustilafilosofia, modernismi, postmodernismi

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Helsinki, November 2015

Anniina Leiviskä

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

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- III Leiviskä, A. (2013). Finitude, Fallibilism and Education towards Non-dogmatism: Gadamer's Hermeneutics in Science Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 45(5), 516–530.

1 INTRODUCTION

The rise of postmodern philosophies in the late 1970s and early 1980s has generated one of the most prominent and protracted philosophical controversies of recent decades: the debate between modernism and postmodernism. In this debate, postmodernism has often been labelled as a radical form of philosophical nihilism that rejects the idea of foundational and cognitively accessible universal truths defended by modernism (Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993, 3). Jürgen Habermas has been one of the key representatives of modernism in the debate, attacking particularly the French postmodern current of thought from Bataille via Foucault to Derrida and criticizing them for rejecting the very commitments to truth, rationality and freedom that alone make philosophical critique possible (Peters, 1995, 23–24). Postmodernists, for their part, have often perceived modernism as a profoundly self-deceptive movement that merely conceals the provincial – that is, culturally imperialistic, Eurocentric and class-specific – roots of its claimed universalism (Bauman, 1993, 128–129; Cahoon, 1996, 12; Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993, 5–6). Moreover, one of the arguments presented by many postmodernists is that, instead of fulfilling their emancipatory promises, such modernist ideas as universally shared rationality and truth and the distinctions and classifications associated with them have become mere vehicles of discipline, power, marginalization and control (Bauman, 1993, 128–129; Bain, 1995, 4). As Richard Bernstein (1983, 19; 1986, 344–345) points out, this radical juxtaposition between modernism and postmodernism is profoundly misleading, as it gains its force from a way of thinking that is itself being called into question: that is, “Cartesian anxiety” (ibid.) – the fear that if there are no basic constraints or foundations or ‘rules of the game’, we are confronted with an intellectual and moral chaos where anything goes. Bernstein (1986, 345) further argues that there is an almost desperate attempt to break out of and move beyond the dichotomies that characterize contemporary philosophical thinking.

The three studies of this thesis participate in the discussion concerning the modernism-postmodernism debate from the viewpoint of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1900–2002) philosophy. Gadamer is one of the most important representatives of the tradition of modern hermeneutics and, at the same time, one of the central figures of twentieth-century continental philosophy. Gadamer’s philosophy, and particularly his main work *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960) in which he launched his prominent project of *philosophical hermeneutics*, represents a distinct and ground-breaking approach to the basic problems of hermeneutics. Gadamer’s project, deriving its primary influence from Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy on the one hand and Heideggerian thinking on the other, establishes a rigorous critique of both

Enlightenment rationalism and the intrusion of the methodology of the modern sciences into the humanities. Simultaneously, Gadamer develops cogent accounts of reason, truth and knowledge that refrain from relativism and subjectivism. The purpose of the three studies of this thesis is to illuminate the relation of Gadamer's philosophy to both modernist and postmodernist philosophical approaches and particularly to examine the potential of Gadamer's philosophy to contribute to the overcoming of the major philosophical problems and limitations associated with them. Accordingly, using Gadamer's philosophy as their point of departure, the studies of this thesis aim to offer a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by the modernist philosophies of education on the one hand and the postmodernist educational standpoints on the other.

In order to clarify what lies at the core of the modernism-postmodernism debate that gives the studies of this thesis their general framework, I will briefly illustrate what is typically meant by the concepts of 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' and what these concepts refer to particularly in the context of this thesis. Firstly, it must be noted that neither of these concepts have univocal or established meanings, but these meanings have been subject to continuous discussion and debate. Both modernism and postmodernism are catch-all concepts or general umbrella terms for a variety of related meanings and both of these terms also belong to a family of interlinked concepts such as 'modern', 'modernity', 'postmodern' and 'postmodernity'. In this context, my attempt is not to provide exhaustive definitions for all of these concepts, but rather to focus on definitions that are important for understanding the studies of this thesis and the philosophical discussion in which they participate. Therefore, the following descriptions should be understood as providing only one possible way of defining these terms. Furthermore, although both the concepts of 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' are also employed to designate certain movements within culture and art, I delimit my examination to the philosophical meaning of these concepts.

In the field of philosophy, the concept of 'modernity' most often designates an era, an attitude and a way of thinking that began in the seventeenth century with Descartes, reached its full maturity with the Enlightenment and extended well into the twentieth century (e.g. Cahoon, 1996, 12). One of the most prominent definitions of the term has been given by Jürgen Habermas (1993) in his famous essay "Modernity – An Incomplete Project". Following Max Weber, Habermas (1993, 103) uses the term "the project of modernity" to refer to the development originating in the Enlightenment, which consisted of the attempt to develop objective science, universal morality and autonomous art according to their inner logic. The accumulated knowledge in these fields was to be utilized to advance the rationalization of everyday social life. The expectation was that the developments in these domains would promote not only the control of

natural forces, but also the understanding of self and world, moral progress, the justice of institutions and ultimately the happiness of human beings (ibid.). This Habermasian definition captures well what are typically perceived as the basic aspirations of modernity. As Cahoon (1996, 12) points out, the positive self-image that modern Western culture has often projected of itself is a civilization founded on scientific knowledge of the world and rational knowledge of value, which places the highest premium on individual human life and freedom. This culture believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress through virtuous, self-controlled work, creating a better material, political and intellectual life for all (ibid.).

However, in contrast to this broad and societal characterization of the concept of *modernity*, the meaning of the concept of *modernism* intended in the context of this thesis is better captured through a narrower, more strictly philosophical definition presented by Bernstein (1986, 343–344), Dummett (1978, 458) and Natoli and Hutcheon (1993, 3). According to these authors, the basic concern of modern philosophy persisting from Descartes to the present has been to turn philosophy into a rigorous science, to discover its real foundations, its proper object and its systematic methodology. The purpose of this endeavour is to overcome the situation where philosophy is merely a battleground among competing opinions and thus to turn it into a legitimate form of knowledge. This definition of modernism shares some features with the concept of “objectivism” described by Bernstein (1983, 8) by which he refers to the idea “that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness”. For an objectivist, the purpose of philosophy is to discover what this framework is and to defend the claim to have discovered it with the strongest possible reasons (ibid.). In what follows, I will primarily use the concept of modernism in this narrow sense to designate a line of thinking closely related to foundationalism. However, it must be noted that for contemporary modernists or objectivists such positions as Cartesian absolutism are no longer viable options. As Bernstein (1983, 12) points out, “the dominant temper of our age is fallibilistic” and therefore contemporary modernists and objectivists accept that there are no nontrivial knowledge claims that are immune to criticism.

The term ‘postmodernism’ is generally perceived as highly controversial. There are few philosophers who have explicitly identified their approach as ‘postmodern’ – most prominently Jean-François Lyotard, Gianni Vattimo, John Caputo and, in some connections, also Richard Rorty – while other thinkers who are often regarded as postmodernists have rejected the label. Moreover, it has been a topic of constant controversy, whether postmodernism can be perceived as establishing a radical break from modernism or whether it should rather be seen as a continuation of modernism or even as a development *within*

modernism itself (e.g. Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993, 3–4). The idea of self-critique and self-reflexivity is anything but foreign to modernism – rather, the critique of modernism can be regarded as beginning in the very heart of modern philosophy, in Kantianism, as Kant’s philosophy was set out to demonstrate the profound limitations of our ability to know (e.g. Habermas, 1998a, 260). Moreover, the critique of the self-destructive and self-contradictory tendencies of modernism presented by many postmodernists can be viewed as a continuation of parallel critiques developed within modernism itself. Perhaps the most prominent of these critiques is Theodor Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and similar critiques have also been presented by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and even Habermas, although Habermas (1993, 106) argues that the self-contradictory tendencies of modernization should not lead us to reject the project of modernity.

What is evident, however, is that postmodernism does not constitute one unified discourse, a systematic theory or a comprehensive philosophy, but it should rather be understood as an umbrella term for a multiplicity of philosophical lines of thinking, which nevertheless share some common features with other philosophical approaches that can be referred to as postmodern (e.g. Usher & Edwards, 1994, 7–8). Although some of the ideas typically regarded as ‘postmodern’ were established already by the poststructuralists – most prominently by Jacques Derrida – in the 1960s, Jean-François Lyotard was one of the first philosophers to bring the highly charged term of ‘postmodernity’ into the philosophical discourse. As Lyotard states in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984), postmodernity stands for the “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1984, xxiv) by which he means the general distrust in such narratives that claim to justify certain practices and institutions by grounding them upon a set of transcendental, ahistorical or universal principles. Accordingly, Lyotard (1984, xxiii) uses the term *modern* “to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse [...] making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth”. Lyotard argues that instead of one all-encompassing metanarrative of science or reason, there are different language games that are power-ridden, heteronomous and untranslatable to each other (Peters, 1995, 32).

Richard Rorty is one of the postmodernists discussed in the studies of this thesis, who has explicitly endorsed the Lyotardian version of postmodernism as a general distrust in metanarratives, while, however, remaining sceptical about the concept of ‘postmodernism’ itself (Rorty, 1991d, 1). In his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979/1980) Rorty famously adopts a similar anti-representational and postfoundational stance as the one advocated by Lyotard. From the viewpoint of this thesis, one of the central insights of the book – and

Rorty's philosophy in a more general sense – is the idea that there is no privileged grid of concepts or categories against which the variety of human practices and beliefs can be judged in order to determine their rationality (Rorty, 1980; see also Festenstein, 2001, 5). This idea bears a resemblance to Bernstein's (1983, 8) definition of "relativism", which refers to the conviction that there is no substantive overarching framework or a single metalanguage by which we can rationally adjudicate or univocally evaluate competing claims or alternative paradigms. Hence, according to a relativist, it is an illusion to believe that there are standards of rationality that are genuinely universal and not subject to historical or temporal change (ibid.).¹ This postfoundational orientation is the primary meaning of the concept of postmodernism employed in the context of this thesis. However, postmodernism should not be understood as the acceptance of an anarchistic 'anything goes' attitude. As Rorty (1982, 166) points out, no philosopher actually holds this view. Rather, postmodernism usually also involves some criteria of rationality, given that these criteria or standards of choosing between different beliefs and paradigms are far less algorithmic and more local than argued by modernists (ibid.).

Another branch of postmodernism addressed in the studies of this thesis is the one that derives its inspiration from Martin Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics. By the tradition of metaphysics, Heidegger refers to the tradition of Western philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche, which is characterized by an ontological and epistemological foundationalism that seeks to ground reality and knowledge upon an "all-founding entity" or an absolute, permanent reference point (Thomson, 2005, 18). The critique of this tradition was one of the major themes of Heidegger's late philosophy. The most prominent followers of this late Heideggerian thinking and thus the representatives of the postmetaphysical current of postmodernism are Jacques Derrida, John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo. Derrida's work is associated with the French 'poststructuralist' orientations of the 1960s and 1970s, which focus on the development and critique of classical structuralism. However, Derrida's philosophy also extends into the critique of the metaphysical and logocentric tendencies of the tradition of Western philosophy in general. This critique is primarily influenced by the late Heideggerian, Nietzschean and Freudian thinking (Peters & Burbules, 2004, 14). Gianni Vattimo advocates a line of postmodernism that he himself refers to as "weak thought" (Vattimo, 1984),

¹ It is noteworthy that Rorty (1991a, 23) rejects the idea of the *relativization* of such concepts as rationality and truth. Instead, he endorses the view that he refers to as "ethnocentrism" (ibid.), which *trivializes* rather than relativizes these concepts. However, the common feature between Bernstein's definition of relativism and Rorty's ethnocentrism is the lack of a metalanguage or a metanarrative that would enable an impartial evaluation of competing language games or paradigms. Accordingly, Rorty also renounces the idea of cognitively accessible universal standards of rationality. I will address Rorty's ethnocentrism as a form of postmodernism in more depth in chapter 4.

which represents an attempt to relinquish the foundational certainties of modernity. Vattimo is also particularly well-known for his developments in the field of postmetaphysical theology. The most relevant thinker in this context, however, is John Caputo, whose philosophy is addressed in one of the studies of this thesis. Caputo's main concern in his project of *radical hermeneutics* (1987) is the redefinition of the concepts of rationality and ethics from a postmetaphysical perspective. For Caputo (1987), this means giving up the universal, fixed determinations associated with these notions and thus understanding both rationality and ethics in terms of radical indeterminacy and openness.

Gadamer's philosophy is particularly interesting in the light of the modernism-postmodernism debate, as it does not straightforwardly fall into either of these categories introduced above. Instead, it is characteristic of Gadamer's philosophical position that it has been criticized by both the Enlightenment-oriented modernists – most prominently by Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel – and postmodern thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and John Caputo (e.g. Schmidt, 1995a, 8–9). Whereas modernists have accused Gadamer of failing to provide a sufficiently objective foundation for understanding and knowledge, postmodernists have criticized him for endorsing the continuity of meaning, security and familiarity over radical difference and disruption (ibid.). However, in some of the most prominent and influential interpretations of Gadamer's hermeneutics, including those of Richard Bernstein (1983) and Georgia Warnke (1987), the fact that Gadamer's philosophical position cannot be unproblematically classified as either 'modern' or 'postmodern' is perceived as a strength rather than a limitation. Namely, these authors suggest that by establishing a middle ground between modernism and postmodernism, Gadamer's hermeneutics represents an important contribution to the movement beyond such binary dichotomies as modernism-postmodernism and objectivism-relativism.

The aim of the studies of this thesis is to continue the line of work established by such authors as Bernstein and Warnke by examining Gadamer's relationship to modernism and postmodernism and thus illustrating the significance of Gadamer's hermeneutics for overcoming the radical opposition between them. The thesis consists of three interrelated studies that are constructed as dialogues between Gadamer's hermeneutics and such philosophical approaches that can be characterized as either 'modernist' or 'postmodernist' and which therefore allow for illuminating Gadamer's relationship to these positions. The philosophies addressed are Jürgen Habermas's critical theory, John Caputo's radical hermeneutics and Richard Rorty's neopragmatism. All of these three philosophers have, at some point, either engaged in actual dialogues with Gadamer or discussed his philosophy with the intention of situating Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in relation to their own philosophical positions. In

this sense, these philosophies provide a particularly fruitful point of departure for elucidating the nature of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its relation to modernism and postmodernism.

The novel contribution of the studies of this thesis is to illuminate the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics to the modernism-postmodernism debate specifically in the field of *the philosophy of education*. As I will demonstrate in section 1.1, a similar debate between modernism and postmodernism that has been ongoing in the field of philosophy has also been witnessed in the philosophy of education. As Nicholas C. Burbules (2000, 311–312) and Stefan Raemaekers (2002, 631) point out, this debate has resulted in a problematic juxtaposition between modernist and postmodernist educational standpoints that is likely to prevent any fruitful discussion and bridge-building between them. David Carr (1998, 3) makes a similar point as he argues that the rise of postmodern educational approaches has resulted in a drastic pluralisation of the discussion within the philosophy of education, which threatens to divide the field into radically different camps. Consequently, the debate has yielded a widespread scepticism concerning the possibility of a genuine communication or agreement in judgements and values between the rival approaches (ibid.).

The argument unfolding in the three studies is that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is capable of avoiding some of the central philosophical problems and limitations associated with the modernist and postmodernist approaches addressed in the studies and therefore it contributes to the movement beyond the unproductive modernism-postmodernism dichotomy in the philosophy of education. In particular, I suggest that Gadamer succeeds in redefining the concepts of rationality and truth in a manner that eschews the foundationalist epistemology of the tradition of the Enlightenment without, however, trivializing or relativizing these notions. Accordingly, through these concepts, Gadamer's hermeneutics can provide education with orienting ideals and principles for the philosophical critique of educational practices without jeopardizing the hermeneutical awareness of the historicity and conditionedness of understanding. As I will later demonstrate, Gadamer's hermeneutics thus offers a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by the modernist philosophies of education on the one hand and the postmodernist educational approaches on the other.

This introductory part of the thesis is structured as follows: the first subsection (1.1) of this chapter focuses on illuminating the modernism-postmodernism debate in the field of the philosophy of education and the second (1.2) provides an overview of the central philosophical interpretations on Gadamer's relationship to modernism and postmodernism. Chapter 2 presents the aims and methodology of the studies and illustrates the choices concerning the primary literature utilized in them. Chapter 3 provides an introduction to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as the general theoretical framework of

the studies. Chapter 4 presents a reinterpretation of the findings of the studies in the light of the modernism-postmodernism debate, thus placing the individual studies within the broader framework of this thesis. Chapter 5 draws together the central findings of the studies and provides responses to the comprehensive research aims and questions of the thesis. The chapter also discusses some of the limitations and restrictions of the studies and indicates possibilities for future research. Chapter 6 is dedicated to final, concluding remarks.

1.1 Modernism and postmodernism in the philosophy of education

Educational theory can generally be regarded as a project of modernity and as deeply associated with the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment (e.g. Carr, 2006, 144; Usher & Edwards, 1994, 24). Wilfred Carr (2006, 144) argues in his article “Education without Theory” that the educational theory project of the twentieth century has been, above all, a foundationalist project inspired by Enlightenment values and ideals and rooted in the epistemological assumptions of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernity. Notably, foundationalism has a much broader meaning for Carr than it has within mainstream epistemology, where the concept has a narrow, technical meaning, denoting one possible response to the ‘regress problem’ concerning epistemic justification (Siegel, 1998, 29). Carr (2006, 143) argues that in Kantian philosophy foundationalism was established as an aspiration to formulate universal standards of rationality that are undeniable to all rational persons and therefore independent of particular historical, social and cultural circumstances (ibid.). He further suggests that it was this Enlightenment aspiration that informed the modern social, political and educational theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century about the way they were to define their intellectual ambitions and conduct their academic debates. Hence, according to Carr (ibid.), twentieth-century educational theory was predicated on the assumption that educational institutions and practices should be governed by theoretical knowledge that rests on rational foundations that are invariable across contexts and cultures and thus provide an external reference point from which the rationality of educational practices can be impartially evaluated.

The most prominent example of the aforementioned foundationalism in educational theory is the analytic philosophy of education established by the famous ‘London School’ represented by R.S. Peters, Paul Hirst and Robert Dearden. As David Carr (1998, 4; see also Martin, 2012, 66) argues, in the works of the aforementioned educational theorists, foundationalism took the form of an attempt to identify the epistemological foundations for educational theory that would enable educational practice to be grounded on transculturally valid

rational principles. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this line of thinking is Hirst's "Forms of Knowledge" thesis, according to which education is a matter of intellectual initiation of learners into a range of conceptually discrete forms of rational knowledge, which can be regarded as logically foundational to any balanced curriculum (Carr, 1998, 4). Peters's project – and especially his famous transcendental arguments, which aimed to justify the practice of education and also to provide a justification for moral principles – can be regarded as an attempt to absolve procedures of justification and deliberation from any charge of arbitrariness (Martin, 2012, 66; Parker, 1997, 55). Therefore, Peters's project is an analogous attempt to Hirst's in providing a rational foundation for educational theory and practice in order to elevate this practice above its initial, unreflected status. David Carr (1998, 5) suggests that the underlying aim of both Hirst's and Peters's projects was the production of rational, unbiased and tolerant citizens of liberal-democratic polity, who are in principle able to operate at critical distance from the beliefs and ideas inherited from historical traditions. In this sense, Hirst's and Peters's philosophies were profoundly oriented by the critical ideals of the Enlightenment.

The foundationalism represented by Hirst, Peters and Dearden among others, however, has been rigorously challenged by different branches of postmodernism since the 1980s and 1990s. In the philosophy of education, the term 'postmodernism' is equally ambiguous as in philosophy in general. Usher and Edwards (1994, 9), for instance, suggest that the entire attempt to capture the meaning of the term 'postmodernism' into a fixed definition is against the message of postmodernism, this message being that knowledge cannot be systematized or totalized into a singular, all-encompassing framework. David Carr (1998, 8–12) uses the umbrella term of postmodernism to refer to philosophical approaches committed to anti-realism about knowledge and truth as diverse as poststructuralism, Rortyan neopragmatism and the sociology of knowledge. Because of this ambiguity of the concept – and particularly because the notion of 'postmodernism' is often associated with undesirable forms of relativism – many philosophers of education prefer the narrower concept of 'postfoundationalism'. Wilfred Carr (2006, 145) explains that postfoundationalism refers to a mode of philosophical discourse that acknowledges that there have been irreversible changes in the ways we now relate to the ideas established by modernism. This discourse also recognizes that these changes are so profound that the forms of theorizing that continue to rely on foundationalist assumptions are no longer acceptable in our attempts to understand the contemporary world. Carr (2006, 146) further argues that the collectively shared insight among the different branches of postfoundational thought is that obtaining a standpoint outside language, history and culture is a myth, as we are always interpretatively situated in and constrained by the particular discourses that we have acquired through socialization and

acculturation. In other words, postfoundationalism denies the possibility of a privileged epistemological position that allows one to transcend the particularities of one's linguistic-historical standpoint. What follows from this is that, instead of being impartial and disinterested, knowledge is inevitably motivated by the interests and concerns of a particular historically, socially and linguistically contingent discourse and therefore preconditioned by the specific norms, beliefs and values embedded in it (Carr, 2006, 146–147; Van Goor, Heyting & Vreeke, 2004, 179).

Especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a torrent of works by the leading philosophers of education – including Blake et al. (1998), Parker (1994), Peters (1995), Peters and Burbules (2004) and Usher and Edwards (1994) – strongly inspired by the central ideas of postmodern and postfoundational philosophy. All of these works are committed to questioning the ideas that have been regarded as particularly important in the modernist philosophy of education. Among the most important issues for these authors is the challenging of the modernist endeavour to discover fixed foundations of knowledge. As Blake et al. (1998, 29–30) suggest, the aim of postmodern or postfoundational philosophy is to demonstrate that the foundational endeavour fails because we have no access to reality or “genuine foundations” unmediated by language and dialogue. Language, they explain, is always profoundly intertwined with social relations and, ultimately, politics of knowledge (ibid.). Hence, as Usher and Edwards (1994, 26) further point out, postmodernism teaches philosophers of education to be sceptical of foundationalism in all forms, including the taken-for-granted paradigms in education, whether these be liberal, conservative or progressive. According to these authors, all of these paradigms share some of the central metaphysical, epistemological and humanistic assumptions of modernism and, consequently, hide their partiality in foundations and absolutes in order to conceal their implications with the operation of power (ibid.). As a consequence of the recognition of the inevitably non-foundational nature of knowledge, the whole idea of educational philosophy and theory becomes problematized in the aforementioned works. The authors argue that the educational theorist can no longer claim the position from which the world of practice could be dictated or prescribed, as educational theory is itself a historically formed practice inseparable from the local contexts within which it is embedded (e.g. Blake et al., 1998, 178–179). However, the authors of these works are insistent that their abolishing of foundations does not raise the spectre of relativism, as the recognition of foundations as discursive constructions does not entail that ‘anything goes’. To challenge foundations is not to provoke irrationalism or paralysis but rather to foreground dialogue and practical engagement – norms are not found but made through struggles in which everyone must assume personal responsibility (Usher & Edwards, 1994, 27; see also Blake et al., 1998, 29).

Generally, the postmodern position described above has been regarded as informative in revealing cultural and subjective biases underlying different conceptions of rationality, objectivity and knowledge, as well as in illuminating the contemporary misbelief in those great narratives that have been characteristic of modernism. However, the postmodern critique of modernism has also generated forceful counter-arguments among those philosophers of education in favour of a more 'modernist' position. Many authors have feared that abandoning the modern epistemological concepts of truth, knowledge, objectivity and reason leads to intolerable relativism (e.g. Carr, 1998). In this context, relativism is often associated with the lack of a foundation or a rational basis for justifying beliefs (Carr, 1998, 11; Heyting, 2004, 496). This kind of relativism is not only perceived as self-refuting (Siegel, 1998, 30), but it is also suspected to result in the inability to distinguish between practices that have educational worth from those that serve mere convenience and utility or are based on either subjective or cultural inclinations (Carr, 1998, 13). It is also argued that education is by definition associated with certain ideals and aims which cannot be deciphered without an understanding of what is worthwhile and reasonable in some at least modestly objective or impartial sense (*ibid.*). Siegel (1998, 19) argues that it is difficult to see how we might understand educational activities such as teaching, the hoped-for educational outcomes such as learning or proposed educational aims and ideals without reference to the modern epistemological notions of rationality, truth, knowledge and justification, as they seem to be basic to any adequate philosophical perspective on education.

Another argument often presented against postmodernism is that rejecting the foundationalist models of justification jeopardizes the possibility of philosophy to exert any critique of social and educational practices (Heyting, 2004; Van Goor, Heyting & Vreeke, 2004). Namely, if the validity of our claims should in the end be traced to the convictions of a community of language-users instead of a 'foundation', philosophy will no longer be able to demonstrate even the wrongness of Nazi-like positions, as Heyting (2004, 496) points out. Papastephanou (2001, 297) introduces a similar critique of postmodernism as she argues that "educational philosophy aspiring to be something more than spectatorial, without some solid account of epistemology and normativity, is self-defeating. It will only reinforce what is socially current without being able to articulate the demand for change, let alone practice it, with all the evident repercussions for practical educational matters".

As it is unfortunately often the case with philosophical debates, the encounter between modernism and postmodernism in the philosophy of education has also resulted in a somewhat fruitless juxtaposition where the modern foundationalist account is polarized with the postmodern relativist anti-account or, depending on the perspective, the modernist monolithic view of reason is placed against the

postfoundational recognition of plurality, contextuality and difference (Burbules, 2000, 311–312; Raemaekers, 2002, 631). As I have indicated earlier, the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism is misleading and it is also prone to prevent any fruitful dialogue between the different approaches as it exaggerates and highlights the differences between these views rather than illuminates their possible similarities and proximities. Moreover, the aggravated opposition between the two positions also conceals the fact that although the search for foundations continues to be a relevant task for some ‘modernist’ philosophers of education, they nevertheless recognize the profoundly fallible and correctible nature of knowledge (e.g. Siegel, 1998, 28). And the same goes for postmodernism: as the authors of *Thinking Again* emphasize, the postfoundational position that they advocate renounces both the subjectivist form of relativism – that is, the idea of a solipsistic subjectivity – as well as the linguistic relativism that portrays different language games as radically incommensurable (Blake et al., 1998, 12–15). Therefore, the viable option, as Bernstein (1983, 12) points out, is between a sophisticated form of fallibilistic objectivism and a nonsubjective, discursive conception of relativism, which are far closer to each other than the current debate in the philosophy of education indicates. This is not to say that the debate is ‘a lot of fuzz over nothing’. Rather, it must be acknowledged that genuine differences nevertheless exist between these rival paradigms and that these differences have also given rise to very different conceptions of education. As I pointed out earlier along the lines of David Carr (1998, 3), the confrontation between modernism and postmodernism in the philosophy of education has yielded a widespread scepticism that genuine communication or agreement in judgments and values might ever be a realistic outcome or a meaningful goal of this dialogue. Bridging the gap between modernism and postmodernism thus remains a continuing task for the philosophers of education.

1.2 Previous interpretations of Gadamer’s relation to modernism and postmodernism

Although there are few studies that explicitly focus on examining the relation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics to the philosophical approaches of modernism and postmodernism (e.g. Bernstein, 1983, 1986), there is a great deal of literature that indirectly addresses this topic through the inquiry of Gadamer’s relationship to the prominent representatives of either modernism or postmodernism. Gadamer’s relationship to modernism has often been examined on the basis of his debates with some of the most distinguished contemporary modernists, Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. Since the debate between hermeneutics and the critique of ideology that took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it has become conventional to perceive Gadamer’s hermeneutics as

a conservative or a relativistic antithesis to the modernist tendencies represented by Habermas and Apel (e.g. How, 1995; Nicholson, 1991; Teigas, 1995). Many interpretations of Gadamer's hermeneutics, however, indicate that this conventional verdict is not fully justified (e.g. Bernstein, 1983; Hekman, 1986; Scheibler, 2000; Warnke, 1987). These interpretations specifically pay attention to Gadamer's notion of dialogue and the rational potential involved in the dialogical structure of understanding. Hermeneutical dialogue is perceived in these readings as a historically and linguistically embedded mode of justification through which prejudices governing understanding can be critically examined (Bernstein, 1983; Scheibler, 2000; Warnke, 1987). In many interpretations, similar possibilities of philosophical critique are associated with Gadamer's concept of truth (Bernstein, 1986; Schmidt, 1995b; Healy, 2007). Bernstein (1986, 351) even goes so far as arguing that when Gadamer appeals to the concept of truth, he is implicitly appealing to what can be "argumentatively validated by a community of interpreters". Bernstein (*ibid.*) therefore suggests that the hermeneutical notion of truth brings Gadamer into the immediate proximity of Habermas's philosophy. In some interpretations, it is also argued that whereas Gadamer succeeds in maintaining the postfoundational orientation that both Habermas and Gadamer pursue, Habermas is ultimately unable to cut his ties with foundationalism (Bernstein, 1983; Healy, 2007; Hekman, 1986).

Because of Gadamer's emphasis on the historicity, linguisticity and context-dependence of understanding, his philosophy has sometimes been associated with the ideas characteristic of postmodernism. One of the most famous of such interpretations is the one presented by Richard Rorty in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979/1980) where he turns to Gadamer's hermeneutics as a model for the kind of "edifying" (Rorty, 1980, 360) philosophy that he himself endorses. This interpretation, however, has been challenged by appealing to Gadamer's continuous concern for the concepts of knowledge and truth. Warnke (1987, 164–165), for instance, provides an illuminating comparison between Gadamer's and Rorty's philosophies and argues that whereas Rorty replaces the concern for truth and knowledge with interestingly diversified discussion, Gadamer holds that it is crucial that we pursue such knowledge that is concerned with living well and developing our praxis. This knowledge, however, is not necessarily achieved by the means of modern scientific method. Similar remarks have also been made by Bernstein (1983, 1986) and Scheibler (2000).

Gadamer's relationship to postmodernism has also been examined through the postmodern critiques directed towards his philosophy. The most well-known of these critiques is perhaps the one presented by Jacques Derrida in the context of the famous Gadamer-Derrida encounter in 1981. The primary issues of this critique were the presumably metaphysical origins of Gadamer's concept of

the “good will”² (1989, 55), the relationship between psychoanalysis and hermeneutics and, finally, the question whether understanding ever amounts to consensus and continuance of meaning in the way suggested by Gadamer (Derrida, 1989, 52–54; see also Madison, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989; Schmidt, 1995a). As a response to Derrida’s critique, many commentators of the debate argue that Derrida misunderstands the meaning of the concept of the “good will” in Gadamer’s hermeneutics and that he also downplays the important roles that otherness and discontinuity play in Gadamer’s philosophy (ibid.). Moreover, the typical verdict of the Gadamer-Derrida encounter is that no genuine dialogue ever took place between the two thinkers due to Derrida’s reluctance to participate in such conversation (Forget, 1989; Madison, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989).

Derrida’s critique of Gadamer has also inspired another postmodern review of Gadamer’s hermeneutics – that is, the one by John Caputo. Caputo accuses Gadamer of endorsing Platonic and Hegelian metaphysics and of appropriating the metaphysical distinction between a stable, objective meaning and its continuously changing expression (Caputo, 1987, 111; 1989, 262; 2000, 46). Caputo further suggests that despite Gadamer’s emphasis on the historicity of understanding, he fails to make use of the radical, postmetaphysical side of Heideggerian thinking and thus remains attached to the tradition of metaphysics (ibid.). This interpretation has been challenged by many commentaries: for instance, Ambrosio (1995, 100–102) argues that Caputo misunderstands the dialogical character of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Gadamer’s relation to late Heideggerian thinking as well as the meaning of the concept of application in Gadamer’s philosophy. Ambrosio (ibid.) further suggests that if there is a sense in which Gadamer’s hermeneutics can be said to concern itself with the transmission of unchanging truths, this must refer to the *questions* that are most fundamental and universal to human beings. Fairfield (2011, 204) makes a similar remark as he points out that Gadamer has clearly rejected all forms of objectivism and essentialism and constantly argued that understanding means ‘understanding differently’. Because of this, Gadamer holds that there can be no single correct, conclusive interpretation as such but rather an inexhaustible multiplicity of meanings. Accordingly, the claim that associates Gadamer’s hermeneutics with metaphysical essentialism is simply false (ibid.).

A third postmodern critique directed towards Gadamer’s philosophy is the one presented by Gianni Vattimo. According to Vattimo (1988, 141), Gadamer’s

² For Gadamer, the notion of the “good will” has nothing to do with the metaphysical concept of the ‘will’. Rather, as Gadamer (1989, 55) himself explains, the concept refers to the idea that “one does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to prove that one is always right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other’s viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating”. Gadamer (ibid.) argues that this kind of attitude is essential for understanding.

hermeneutics “sees no need to take too great a distance from Western metaphysics, but positions itself in a relation of fundamental continuity with it”. Therefore, according to Vattimo, Gadamer’s philosophy fails to provide a consistent critique of this tradition and particularly of the features that manifest themselves in existing social conditions through the dominance of calculative rationality (Vattimo, 1988, 131; Scheibler, 2000, 73). Gadamer is thus forced into the unquestioned acceptance of the existing social conditions as he is unable to exercise a similar productive critique of these conditions that, according to Vattimo, can be associated with Heidegger’s philosophy (Vattimo, 1988, 142; Scheibler, 2000, 80–81; Murphy, 2010, 140–141). Against this line of critique, Scheibler (2000, 81) argues that Gadamer not only appropriates but also develops Heidegger’s philosophy through incorporating into it the awareness of the social, intersubjective and dialogical conditions of language use. Scheibler (ibid.) further argues that the concept of language that Gadamer develops on the basis of Heidegger’s philosophy is fundamentally critical towards modern subjectivism and calculative rationality and thus does not place itself in a relation of continuity with them.

As we can see from these contrasting critiques and interpretations of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, there is no univocal understanding of Gadamer’s relationship to either modernism or postmodernism. Rather, as Schmidt (1995a, 8–9) points out, since the publication of *Truth and Method*, modernists have accused Gadamer of opening the door to relativism and of underrating the critical power of reflection, while the postmodernists have blamed Gadamer for remaining captive to the metaphysical assumptions of the tradition of modern philosophy. As Schmidt (ibid.) further suggests, these contradictory critiques that charge Gadamer for being either too relativistic or, alternatively, not relativistic enough perhaps indicate that Gadamer has in fact laid open a fruitful middle ground between his critics.

This conclusion has been drawn also by many other commentators on Gadamer, perhaps most prominently by Richard Bernstein in his book *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (1983). In this book, Bernstein (1983, 19) presents Gadamer’s hermeneutics as one of the most promising attempts in contemporary philosophy to overcome the problematic opposition between objectivism and relativism.³ Bernstein (1983, 146) particularly focuses on Gadamer’s notion of *phronesis*, which represents the kind of reasoning that involves a distinctive mediation between the universal and the particular. Bernstein associates the specific value of this notion with the idea that there is a form of rationality that is not concerned with objective, theoretical knowledge

³ As I explained in the introduction, the way Bernstein (1983, 8) utilizes the concepts of objectivism and relativism is parallel at least to the definitions of modernism and postmodernism that associate these concepts with the question of foundations of knowledge.

but rather with the practical knowledge and truth that shapes the human *praxis* and which cannot be captured independently of concrete historical situations. Another aspect of Gadamer's thinking emphasized by Bernstein (1983, 153) is Gadamer's notion of dialogue that, according to him, represents a mode of justification characteristic of our historical and linguistic existence.

Bernstein has also provided illuminating comparisons between Habermas, Gadamer and Rorty (Bernstein, 1986) and Habermas, Gadamer and Derrida (Bernstein, 2002). In both cases Bernstein draws the conclusion that although Gadamer's hermeneutics can be interpreted as having more affinities with Habermasian modernism than with either of the postmodernist philosophies mentioned above, the differences between all of the aforementioned approaches are rather differences in degree than absolute oppositions (Bernstein, 1986, 346; 2002, 281). A similar comparison has also been made by Georgia Warnke. She (1987, 168) examines Gadamer's relationship to Habermas's, Apel's and Rorty's philosophies and draws the conclusion that Gadamer seeks to preserve the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and reason while rendering them compatible with the cultural and linguistic embeddedness of understanding. In this sense, Warnke also suggests that Gadamer's philosophy represents a fruitful middle ground between Habermas's and Apel's modernism and Rorty's postmodernism. It is particularly this line of work exemplified by Bernstein and Warnke among others – that is, the line that seeks to illuminate the significance of Gadamer's philosophy for overcoming the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism – that I wish to continue in this thesis.

2 RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODS

In this chapter, I elucidate the common aims of the three studies of this thesis (referred to in the text by Roman numerals I–III) and I also express these aims in the form of research questions to which the studies aim to respond from their respective angles. Moreover, I explicate the methodology of the studies and give a detailed description of their research processes. Finally, I illustrate the choices concerning the primary source literature utilized in this thesis.

2.1 Research aims and questions

The common aim of the studies of this thesis is to examine the possibility of Gadamer's hermeneutics to contribute to the overcoming of the unproductive modernism-postmodernism dichotomy in the field of the philosophy of education. More specifically, the studies aim to clarify the potential of Gadamer's hermeneutics to offer a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by the modernist philosophies of education on the one hand and the postmodernist educational standpoints on the other. The studies seek to accomplish this aim by studying the relationship of Gadamer's philosophy to some of the prominent representatives of modernism and postmodernism and by establishing that Gadamer's hermeneutics circumvents some of the major philosophical problems and limitations associated with these approaches. The studies particularly focus on the concepts of rationality and truth that play a central role in the foundationalist epistemology of modernism and that have been somewhat trivialized or relativized by many postmodernist standpoints. Through Gadamer's redefinitions of these concepts, the studies seek to establish a postfoundational and yet nonrelativistic justification for educational theory and practice and thus to surpass some of the major difficulties associated with modernist and postmodernist philosophies of education.

As I explained in the introduction, in the context of this thesis, I use the concept of modernism in a narrow sense to refer to a line of thinking that is closely associated with foundationalism and the Bernsteinian concept of "objectivism" (Bernstein, 1983, 8). In this sense, the concept of modernism refers to the basic conviction that the task of philosophy is to search for an impartial, objective or universal foundation upon which such notions as rationality and truth can be founded and which allows distinguishing justified beliefs and norms from unjustified ones. In the studies, 'modernism' is represented by Jürgen Habermas's critical theory, which is a widely recognized and utilized philosophical approach not only in contemporary philosophy

but also in the philosophy of education.⁴ Accordingly, with the concept of postmodernism, I refer to such philosophical approaches that profoundly challenge the possibility of the existence of epistemological and ethical foundations. The postmodern approaches suggest that there is no foundation or an over-arching metalanguage upon which the superiority of one paradigm or language game over others could be conclusively determined. Consequently, many postmodernists argue that different language games should be understood as radically incommensurable and non-translatable to one another. As indicated in the introduction, this is the line of thinking that Bernstein (1983, 8) refers to as “relativism”. In the studies, I primarily focus on Richard Rorty’s and John Caputo’s postmodernist philosophies that share some common features with the lines of thought held by many postmodern philosophers of education.

The common aims of the studies can be expressed briefly in the form of the following research questions:

1. How does Gadamer’s hermeneutics relate to Habermasian modernism and the postmodernist philosophies of Caputo and Rorty?
2. What is the relevance of Gadamer’s hermeneutics (and particularly its concepts of rationality and truth) to the philosophy of education?
3. How does Gadamer’s hermeneutics contribute to the overcoming of the unproductive dichotomy between the modernist and postmodernist philosophies of education?

All three studies of this thesis approach the first research question from different perspectives: study I focuses on Gadamer’s relation to Habermas’s modernist philosophy in the context of the Gadamer-Habermas debate. The study particularly defends Gadamer against the charges of conservatism and relativism presented by Habermas. Study II provides a comparison between Habermas’s, Gadamer’s and Caputo’s philosophies and thus illuminates Gadamer’s relationship to both Habermasian modernism and Caputo’s postmodern hermeneutics. Study III compares Gadamer’s and Rorty’s philosophies as approaches to the philosophy of science and thus demonstrates how Gadamer’s hermeneutics departs from Rorty’s postmodern critique of the natural sciences.

The second research question is addressed in studies I and III: study I examines the relevance of Gadamer’s notions of tradition and *phronesis* to the

⁴ Although Habermas refers to himself as a postfoundationalist, the argument that I present in study II is that Habermas’s philosophy involves foundationalist tendencies, which associate his philosophical project with the Bernsteinian concept of objectivism. I address this topic in more depth in section 4.1.

philosophy of education and illustrates how the educational aim of rationality can be conceived from the perspective of historical situatedness. Study III focuses on the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics to science education through illuminating the hermeneutical dimensions of learning, knowledge and scientific research. These studies also provide partial answers to the third research question as they demonstrate how such concepts as rationality, knowledge and truth can be sustained as the central concepts of the philosophy of education while taking into account the profound historicity and linguisticity of human existence. Moreover, in addition to the three original studies, the research questions are addressed in a comprehensive manner in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 provides a reinterpretation of the findings of the original studies in the light of the modernism-postmodernism distinction and chapter 5 draws together the central findings of all three studies and discusses them in regard to the aims and research questions introduced above.

2.2 Research method

The studies of this thesis are based on philosophical research and analysis of the central philosophical literature utilized in the studies. As Claudia Ruitenberg (2009, 316) points out, philosophical research employs a much broader conception of method than its Baconian definition as "a technique that can be applied reliably irrespective of the talent of the researcher". According to her, in philosophical research the concept of method refers to the various ways and modes in which philosophers think, read, write, speak and listen, make their work systematic, purposeful and responsive to past and present philosophical concerns and conversations (ibid.). This broad conception of 'method' also applies to the studies of this thesis. However, this definition does not yet provide much information of the actual stages, choices or procedures involved in the research processes of the studies. Therefore I have outlined the following description to illustrate the nature of these processes. The research 'method' of the studies can be associated with the implementation of the following steps: (1) proposing an initial hypothesis or a research problem; (2) studying the relevant literature concerning this hypothesis; (3) searching for lines of argumentation and interpretation for *and* against the initial hypothesis and comparing them in a critical manner; (4) revising or reasserting the initial hypothesis on the basis of the findings of the previous step and, finally, (5) constructing the argument of the study and supporting it with relevant references to the literature. Evidently, the research processes did not necessarily follow the exact sequence of the steps listed above but these steps are rather intended as examples of the kind of typical procedures and stages involved in these processes. In what follows, I will briefly explicate how these steps were carried out in the individual studies.

In study I, I began with two initial hypotheses: (1) despite Gadamer's emphasis on historicity and tradition, the conventional view of Gadamer's philosophy as inherently conservative is not fully justified; and (2) Gadamer's idea of the interrelated nature of tradition and reason might have important implications for the philosophy of education. My general impression was that the Gadamer-Habermas debate had strongly influenced the way Gadamer's philosophy is perceived in the mainstream philosophical discussion. Therefore I began the research concerning the first hypothesis with a thorough study of the four essays of the Gadamer-Habermas debate and the relevant commentary literature on the topic. I learned that there was a strong current of interpretations supporting Habermas's argument and I also discovered that this current had gained a predominant role in the philosophical discussion. However, I also found another line of interpretation paying more attention to the dialogical and critical dimensions of Gadamer's concept of understanding and thus supporting my own initial interpretation of Gadamer's philosophy. After critical examination, I was still convinced that the latter line of interpretation found more support in Gadamer's own texts. Therefore, utilizing this line of interpretation as my point of departure, I defended Gadamer against the charges of conservatism through illuminating the critical and reflective potential involved in hermeneutical understanding. I then moved on to my second initial hypothesis regarding the educational significance of Gadamer's philosophy. I studied the relevant discussions on the concept of rationality within the philosophy of education and discovered that the concept is often associated with the ability to adopt a critical distance to one's cultural and social heritage. In contrast to this, Gadamer's claim is that reason and tradition are fundamentally intertwined. From this perspective, I realized that Gadamer's notion of rationality might provide a needed corrective to the somewhat ahistorical understanding of reason prevailing in many educational interpretations of the concept. Based on these findings, I finally constructed my own argument concerning the significance of Gadamer's concepts of tradition and *phronesis* for outlining an idea of situated rationality as a central educational aim.

In study II, my initial hypothesis was that Gadamer's philosophy does not unproblematically fall into either of the categories of objectivism or relativism and it might therefore contribute to the overcoming of the radical opposition between them. I had formed this hypothesis based on my reading of Richard Bernstein's work among other authors. I chose to examine Gadamer's relation to objectivism and relativism specifically through Habermas's and Caputo's philosophies because their critiques of Gadamer represented contrasting interpretations of Gadamer's hermeneutics, one associating it with relativism and the other with metaphysical essentialism. I started my research with a thorough examination of these critiques and the commentary literature related

to them. I found that there were certain limitations to both Habermas's and Caputo's readings of Gadamer. Namely, there was a line of interpretation suggesting that Gadamer's philosophy is much less relativistic than Habermas claims and almost a unanimous verdict that Caputo's interpretation of the inherent essentialism of Gadamer's hermeneutics is misguided. These interpretations supported my initial understanding of Gadamer's philosophy as a middle way between objectivism and radical relativism. I decided to go beyond a mere defensive response to Habermas's and Caputo's critiques and to reconstruct a Gadamerian concept of rationality on the basis of those interpretations of Gadamer that emphasize the dialogical and justificatory nature of hermeneutical understanding. This reconstruction also proved to be fruitful for indicating deficiencies in Habermas's and Caputo's own conceptions of rationality. The conclusive argument that I developed in the study was that the Gadamerian notion of rationality avoids the foundationalist tendencies encountered in Habermas's philosophy as well as the radical relativism associated with Caputo's postmodern concept of reason.

In study III, I had two initial hypotheses: (1) although Gadamer's philosophy shares some features with the postmodern critique of science, it does not result in a similar rejection of the concepts of knowledge and truth as encountered in many postmodern philosophies, including Rorty's; and (2) Gadamer's hermeneutics might offer an enriched understanding of the nature of science education by illuminating its hermeneutical features. I began the research concerning the first hypothesis by studying both Rorty's and Gadamer's texts that were relevant to the topic as well as the literature on the hermeneutic philosophy of science and science education. Despite some of the similarities in Gadamer's and Rorty's philosophies, I discovered that their attitudes toward such concepts as truth and knowledge were radically different. I also found that the authors advocating a hermeneutic philosophy of science sharply contrasted Gadamer's philosophy with postmodern philosophies, sociology of knowledge and other approaches in which scientific research is reduced to a mere social or political phenomenon (e.g. Eger, 2006). These findings served as the ground for my argument concerning the compatibility of Gadamer's hermeneutics with some of the ideas involved in natural scientific research, particularly the idea of fallibilism. I then reflected on my second hypothesis by examining the literature on hermeneutics and science education, Martin Eger's (2006) work in particular. Following Eger's argumentation and Gadamer's (2008a) own claim concerning the universality of the hermeneutical experience, I constructed two arguments of which the first concerned the hermeneutical nature of science education and learning. The second argument was more prescriptive as it indicated that incorporating the awareness of the hermeneutical features of knowledge and research into science education might prevent the students from adopting a narrow, technical orientation towards the sciences.

2.3 Source literature

The primary source utilized in the studies of this thesis is Gadamer's main work *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960/2004), which is unquestionably Gadamer's most important and thorough examination of the themes of his philosophical hermeneutics. In addition to *Truth and Method*, I also used several of Gadamer's individual essays as the source material of the studies. In studies I and II, I primarily utilized the two essays that Gadamer wrote during the Gadamer-Habermas debate as responses to Habermas's critique: "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology: Metacritical Comments on *Truth and Method*" (1967/1986) and "Reply to My Critics" (1971/1990). These essays play a central role in the Gadamer-Habermas debate and they were therefore particularly important for understanding Gadamer's relation to Habermas's philosophy. In study III, in addition to *Truth and Method*, I utilized some of the essays of the translated essay collections *Reason in the Age of Science* (1981) and *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (2008) in which Gadamer addresses the themes of natural scientific research and the technological orientation of the modern sciences.⁵ In the context of study III, these essays were particularly useful for clarifying Gadamer's conception of the natural sciences. In addition to the aforementioned works, in this introductory part of the thesis, I employ some of Gadamer's later writings on ethics, practical philosophy and modern sciences included in the essay collections *Reason in the Age of Science* (1981), *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays* (1998) and *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics* (1999).⁶

Regarding Habermas's philosophy, in study I my primary sources were the section on hermeneutics in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1970/1988) and the essay "On Hermeneutics' Claim to Universality" (1970/1986) in which Habermas establishes his critique of Gadamer's hermeneutics. These essays form a central part of the Gadamer-Habermas debate and therefore they were particularly important for my examination in study I. In study II, in addition to the two aforementioned texts, I also strongly relied on Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume I. Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (1981/1984) in which Habermas establishes his famous theory of communicative action and also introduces the concept of communicative

⁵ The essays utilized were "On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy" (Gadamer, 1981a) and "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" (Gadamer, 2008a) of which the second is also published as a part of the essay collection *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (2007).

⁶ These essays include "What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason" (Gadamer, 1981b), "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" (Gadamer, 1981c), "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task" (Gadamer, 1981d), "The Ideal of Practical Philosophy" (Gadamer, 1998a), "Science and the Public Sphere" (1998b), "Science as an Instrument of Enlightenment" (1998c) and "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics" (1999).

rationality. The second volume of Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative Action*, however, was not utilized in the studies, as it did not directly bear upon the issues addressed in them. In this introductory part of the thesis, I have also utilized some of Habermas's other important works that address the topic of communicative rationality, including *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983/1990), *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (1988/1994), *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985/1998) and *Truth and Justification* (1999/2003).

In regard to Caputo's philosophy, in study II I focused on Caputo's two renowned works *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (1987) and *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (2000). The first of these books is the one in which Caputo launches his philosophical project known as radical hermeneutics and where he also establishes his critique of Gadamer's philosophy, whereas in the second he continues his discussion on these themes. In study III, my primary sources on Rorty's philosophy were *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979/1980) where Rorty utilizes Gadamer's philosophy as a model for his idea of the "edifying" nature of philosophy; and the essay collection *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (1991) in which Rorty addresses the topic of natural sciences and also provides discussions on the concepts of truth, rationality, objectivity and relativism.

Concerning secondary literature, I primarily employed works that approach Gadamer's hermeneutics from an epistemological viewpoint or at least incorporate an epistemological perspective into their examination (e.g. Barthold, 2010; Bernstein, 1983, 1986; Warnke, 1987). This choice was made based on the general focus of this thesis on the modernism-postmodernism debate that mainly concerns epistemological questions and issues. Moreover, I also utilized works that were particularly important for illuminating the nature and role of the concept of dialogue in Gadamer's hermeneutics (Gjesdal, 2008; Healy, 2007; Scheibler, 2000; Vilhauer, 2010). This concept is one of the central notions of Gadamer's philosophy and it plays a pivotal role in all three studies of this thesis.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to Gadamer's hermeneutics focusing particularly on the historical and dialogical nature of understanding and on some of the central Gadamerian concepts associated with these themes. The notions of historicity and dialogue are not only crucial for understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics in a general sense but they are particularly important for clarifying Gadamer's views on the concepts of rationality, truth and knowledge that play a central role in the modernism-postmodernism debate.

3.1 Introduction to the central themes of Gadamer's philosophy

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) began his philosophical career as a scholar of ancient Greek philosophy. His studies with his long-term teacher and mentor Martin Heidegger in Freiburg in the 1920s profoundly influenced the course of Gadamer's intellectual development and had a far-reaching impact on his later philosophy. During the Third Reich and World War II, Gadamer kept to his studies in ancient Greek philosophy and continued his career as a university teacher and professor.⁷ It was not until 1960 that Gadamer finally published his major work *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode)* in which he established the foundations of his philosophical project that came to be known as *philosophical hermeneutics*. The importance of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* was soon recognized internationally. As a result, Gadamer rose from an appreciated university professor and little-known scholar in ancient Greek philosophy to one of the leading representatives of modern hermeneutics and to the key figures of twentieth-century continental philosophy (Lawn, 2006).

Although *Truth and Method* is a vast and multifaceted book that involves extensive parts on aesthetics and language, the idea of *the historicity of understanding* and the associated critique of modernism is by far the most influential contribution of Gadamer's main work. Deriving his primary inspiration from Heidegger's early works, especially *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, 1927/2010)*, Gadamer sets himself against the basic tendencies of

⁷ After Freiburg, Gadamer followed Heidegger to the University of Marburg, where he worked first as an assistant from 1923 and then, from 1928, as a *Privatdozent*, until he was finally granted professorship in 1937. After Marburg, Gadamer held a professorship at the University of Leipzig for a decade (1938–1948) and was also later appointed rector of the university (1946). In the fall of 1947, Gadamer received a professorship in Frankfurt where he worked for two years until he was appointed as chair of the philosophy department at the University of Heidelberg, where he stayed until his retirement in 1968 (Gadamer, 1997; Dostal, 2002).

modernism and the Enlightenment, challenging their over-reliance on the ideal of a rational method in the quest for certain and presuppositionless knowledge. Gadamer's central argument is that the modern faith in a rationally authorized method and scientific progress has led us to neglect the mode of being that precedes all methodological, rational and scientific endeavours (Lawn, 2006, 34; see also Weinsheimer, 1985, 164). According to Gadamer, this mode of being is *historicity*, which refers to the idea that our being and understanding are ontologically connected to the historical circumstances in which we find ourselves (Gadamer, 2004, 268, 278). Gadamer (ibid.) thus argues that rather than having an ahistorical essence, our humanity as well as our *rationality* is preconditioned by the historical pre-understanding that we inherit from our tradition. This idea represents a radical break with Cartesian epistemology in which the aim was precisely to achieve knowledge purified from the contextual factors involved in the process of knowledge formation. Gadamer (2004, 277, 282) argues that perceiving our belongingness to history as something that must be reflectively surpassed neglects the fact that reason is itself situated in tradition and therefore cannot make the totality of tradition an object of investigation. In Gadamer's view, there is no critical space, no Archimedean point or a secure foundation existing outside the medium of tradition that constitutes our being.

In addition to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Gadamer's critique also extends to the earlier tradition of modern hermeneutics.⁸ Gadamer argues that understanding should not be perceived as a specific method through which the original meaning of the historical text or some other expression of the past can be attained (Gadamer, 2004, 268). Rather, following in Heidegger's footsteps, Gadamer suggests that understanding is our very mode of being-in-the-world (e.g. Warnke, 1987, 40–41). Moreover, Gadamer (2004, 300–301) also argues that because our understanding of texts is shaped by the interpretative tradition to which we belong and by the unique place that we occupy in this tradition, the meaning of a text cannot be grasped independently of our particular historical circumstances. Therefore, the interpretation that results from the process of understanding is not one that reflects the intentions of the text's original author but it is rather an expression of the particular significance that the text has for the interpreter and his or her historical situation (Gadamer, 2004, 283, 298).

Gadamer's idea of the historicity of understanding thus also entails an important transformation of the concepts of knowledge and truth. Namely, one of Gadamer's central arguments is that these notions are not exhausted by the

⁸ Gadamer (2004) particularly criticizes the hermeneutic philosophies of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) as well as the historicism of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–1884) for their methodological orientation that borrows its model from the ideal of objectivity involved in the natural sciences (e.g. Lawn & Keane, 2011, 38).

knowledge accessible through the modern scientific method (e.g. Bernstein, 1983, 151). As Bernstein (ibid.) points out, one of the primary intentions of *Truth and Method* is to defend the legitimacy of speaking of the ‘truth’ of works of art, texts and tradition. Hence, against the idea of truth as correspondence between a thought and its object, Gadamer introduces the idea of truth as a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*, Gadamer, 2004, 305). This fusion is understood as the emergence of a new horizon of meanings that opens up new possibilities of understanding and is thus primarily valuable to the one who understands and to his or her particular historical situation. In what follows, I will examine these general ideas of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics in greater detail, focusing on the themes of historicity and dialogicality of understanding.

3.2 The historicity of understanding

The idea of the historicity of understanding in Gadamer’s hermeneutics is based on the view that understanding always takes place from within a historically and linguistically structured pre-understanding that functions as a condition of possibility of understanding. Gadamer refers to the individual preconceptions or prejudgments that constitute this pre-understanding as *prejudices* (*Vorurteil*, Gadamer, 2004, 273). For Gadamer, the significance of prejudices for understanding is twofold. On the one hand, prejudices are necessary and positive preconditions of understanding, in the sense that they allow different things to appear *as* something and therefore as meaningful. On the other hand, since prejudices present the objects of understanding as always already pre-interpreted, they prevent understanding from grasping these objects impartially or ‘in themselves’. Prejudices can thus provide only a limited and partial perspective into the matters at hand (Hogan, 2010, 100–102; Warnke, 1987, 75–76).

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s rehabilitation of the notion of prejudice is intended as a critique of the ideal of presuppositionless knowledge involved in the Enlightenment. According to Gadamer (2004, 273), it was not until the Enlightenment that the notion of prejudice gained the negative connotations associated with it today, as the notion was then misleadingly given the meaning of an unfounded judgment. As pointed out above, in Gadamer’s philosophy, prejudices are inevitable preconditions of understanding and thus do not have a positive or negative role *per se*. Rather, they are simply judgments that precede the examination of the elements of a situation (ibid.). Gadamer argues that the Enlightenment’s “prejudice against prejudices” (Gadamer, 2004, 274) has led to two false assumptions: firstly, that methodical reflection can result in complete freedom from prejudices and, secondly, that prejudices are always disadvantageous for understanding. Gadamer’s polemic claim is that there are

also prejudices that can be beneficial for understanding and therefore 'knowledge' is not tantamount to freedom from presuppositions.

Gadamer's rehabilitation of the concepts of tradition and authority is closely related to the idea of the prejudiced nature of understanding. The primary intention of this rehabilitation is to correct the Enlightenment's misguided view of tradition and authority as being diametrically opposed to rationality and reflection. Gadamer (2004, 279–281) argues that authority is essentially based on *knowledge* instead of coercion or dominion. He justifies this controversial claim by suggesting that a person relies on the authority of another when this person believes that the other knows something better and not because the person is coerced to do so (ibid.). Gadamer (2004, 281) then introduces the idea of *the authority of tradition* as a critique of the Enlightenment's abstract separation between tradition and reason. Gadamer's (2004, 282–283) claim is that this separation has led to the erroneous belief that rational reflection only dissolves traditional prejudices, whereas it can actually also result in the reappropriation of tradition. By this argument, Gadamer's intention is not to suggest that we *should* preserve traditional beliefs and practices but, rather, to indicate that the Enlightenment's abstract opposition between tradition and reason has mistakenly designated tradition as an irrational source of error and dogma. Gadamer's rejection of conservatism becomes especially clear in his statement that Romanticism, which regards tradition as an absolute source of validity against which all reason must remain silent, is ultimately just as dogmatic and prejudiced as the Enlightenment. Namely, it merely reproduces the Enlightenment's abstract opposition between tradition and reason (Gadamer, 2004, 282). Gadamer's purpose is, above all, to highlight the idea that tradition is itself a condition of the possibility of understanding and rationality and therefore it cannot be perceived as contradictory to reason.

This bears directly upon Gadamer's idea of tradition as *effective history* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*, Gadamer, 2004, 299). The concept of effective history refers to the idea that, when we understand some work of art or a historical text from a temporal distance, its meaning can only be grasped as it is transmitted and effected by the tradition of interpretations that has gone before us. Gadamer argues that effective history influences our understanding to the extent that it determines what appears to us as being meaningful and worth inquiring into (Gadamer, 2004, 300). Effective history thus makes understanding inescapably partial and interested instead of being objective and disinterested. History is continuously influencing us in the present, even in the denial of its influence or in the attempt to prevent it from affecting our understanding (ibid.). It determines the background of our values, cognitions and even our critical judgments and we can therefore never give a full account of the ways in which history influences us, nor is it possible to become detached from this influence

completely. “Historically effected consciousness is more being than consciousness”, as Gadamer (2008b, 38) himself states.⁹

However, despite Gadamer’s insistence on the power of effective history, he develops a distinctly reflective notion of “effective historical consciousness” (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, Gadamer, 2004, 301). With this concept he refers to both the fact that our consciousness is always effected by history *and* to the mandate that one’s historical situatedness must be made explicit in order to examine the ways in which it operates in understanding the historical past. The concept of effective historical consciousness thus simultaneously signifies an awareness of the limits of hermeneutical understanding *and* the reflective examination of these limits. According to Gadamer (2004, 301–302), hermeneutical understanding can become genuinely influential only as a consequence of incorporating effective historical consciousness as a part of its inquiry.

Gadamer’s idea of *application* (*Anwendung*, Gadamer, 2004, 306) follows directly from the notion of effective history. Since we cannot understand a historical text or some other embodiment of tradition independently of our situatedness in history, understanding the meaning of a text requires *applying* it to ourselves and to our particular historical situation. However, Gadamer (2004, 309–310) argues that application is not a conscious act performed after understanding the meaning of the text. That is, we do not first grasp the meaning of the text in some detached, objective or universal sense and then apply it to ourselves. Rather, when we understand, we have always already applied the text’s meaning to ourselves and to our particular historical situation. Rather than two distinct features, understanding and application are therefore inseparable elements of a unitary hermeneutical process (Gadamer, 2004, 309; see also Vilhauer, 2010, 56).

Gadamer (2004, 310) draws the model for the concept of application from the tradition of theological and legal hermeneutics on the one hand and from the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* (prudence or practical reason), on the other.¹⁰

⁹ This citation is from the essay “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection” that was published as a part of the translated essay collection *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. In addition, the essay has also been published under the name “Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology: Metacritical Comments on Truth and Method” in the edited volume *The Hermeneutics Reader*. In this translation, the aforementioned sentence is translated as follows: “effective historical consciousness is inescapably more existence than it is consciousness” (Gadamer, 1986, 288).

¹⁰ Gadamer (2004, 307–308) argues that in the early tradition of hermeneutics, application was still recognized as an integral element of all understanding. It was not until romantic hermeneutics that the dimension of application was misleadingly excluded from the hermeneutical process. Gadamer (2004, 309) points out that there are specifically two disciplines – legal and theological hermeneutics – which provide a genuine example for hermeneutical understanding, as in these disciplines application has always formed a central dimension of the process of understanding.

In Aristotelian ethics, the concept of *phronesis* is associated with the relationship between the universal and the particular. More specifically, it refers to the practical rationality that enables the application of a universal moral norm within a concrete situation that requires moral action.¹¹ Gadamer reinterprets and modifies this Aristotelian notion in order to present a profoundly hermeneutical idea: namely, that we cannot understand meanings independently of the concreteness of our historical lives and of the particular situations in which we always already find ourselves (Barthold, 2010, 60). Understanding is therefore not merely reproductive but it always involves a productive element as well, as it constantly adds new dimensions to the meaning of the text that spring from the particular contexts of interpretation. This also means that every age and every generation inevitably understands historical texts and other embodiments of tradition in a new and unique way, differently from their predecessors (Gadamer, 2004, 296; see also Vilhauer, 2010, 55).

However, the notion of application should not be understood as indicating that understanding is arbitrary or entirely determined by particular contexts of interpretation. Rather, as Gadamer (2004, 294) emphasizes, understanding is always directed toward the meaning of the text and particularly to the *truth* that the text articulates. Hence, Gadamer's (2004, 309) claim is that an interpretation is, in fact, *codetermined* by two elements. Firstly, we cannot disregard the meaning of what is being applied – that is, we cannot interpret the text, the moral norm or the law in an arbitrary way as there is something normatively binding and true in what the object of interpretation is saying. Secondly, however, because of the historical nature of our being, we can genuinely understand the meaning of the text, the law or the norm only through understanding it from the perspective of our own situation. In other words, we can only understand the meaning of the text as a claim of truth upon *us* and *our world* (Gadamer, 2004, 209; see also Vilhauer, 2010, 120). Understanding thus always mediates between the meaning of the text and the particularity of the interpreter or, to put it in more general terms, between the past and the present.

The idea of understanding as mediation between the present and the past, however, does not mean that understanding merely serves the continuity of tradition. On the contrary, Gadamer argues that historically effected understanding is *transformative* by nature – that is, it transforms the interpreter and his or her structure of prejudices. Gadamer's concept of

¹¹ Aristotle initially developed the notion of *phronesis* as a critique of the Platonic notion of the Good. According to Aristotle, this notion was empty and abstract and therefore meaningless for practical moral deliberation as it did not enable one to choose the adequate action in a particular situation that requires moral decision-making. *Phronesis* is for Aristotle the mode of reasoning that allows the mediation between the general, abstract moral norm and the concrete situation at hand and thus enables one to act in the right way (e.g. Vilhauer, 2010, 121–124).

experience (*Erfahrung*, Gadamer, 2004, 341) describes this transformative dimension of understanding. The concept represents the moment in understanding when one is surprised and pulled up short in novel and unique ways by the text or some other embodiment of tradition, which presents one with something entirely new, confusing and unexpected (Lawn, 2006, 62). In this sense, genuine experiences are always *negative* by nature, as they negate one's previously held assumptions and thus make one aware of the limits of understanding (Gadamer, 2004, 247, emphasis added). Gadamer's concept of experience therefore radically departs from the notion of experience in the empirical sciences where the concept is associated with the idea of accumulation of knowledge. The essence of Gadamer's concept of experience is precisely in its unrepeatability and uniqueness. According to Gadamer (2004, 248), experience transforms the experiencing person, as whatever is experienced becomes a part of the person and his or her worldview and, therefore, the same thing cannot be experienced again, at least not in an identical way. In Gadamer's (2004, 351) view, what follows from experiences of negation is openness to new experiences and thus being an experienced person means having a radically non-dogmatic orientation toward oneself and the world. Experiences teach us that the interpretation at which we arrive in understanding is never the final word and therefore we must maintain ourselves open to new experiences. Experiences are thus ultimately experiences of human finitude, as Gadamer (*ibid.*) points out.

According to Gadamer (2004, 298), understanding historical texts involves a particular potential for transformative experiences: namely, the text as an articulation of the past rarely meets our expectations or anticipated meanings and therefore understanding the text does not leave our prejudices intact. As Gadamer (2004, 271) emphasizes, we cannot simply understand meanings in an arbitrary way and therefore we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meanings if the text resists them. This is why Gadamer (2004, 298) speaks of the productivity of temporal distance in understanding historical texts and even argues that temporal distance can solve the problem of critique in hermeneutics. He claims that it is impossible to distinguish between prejudices by which we understand from those by which we misunderstand, as long as the structure of prejudices that guides our understanding operates unconsciously (*ibid.*). The provocation provided by the unfamiliarity and unexpectedness of the text may bring the unconsciously operating prejudices into awareness and thus enable their examination. However, as Gadamer (2004, 295) points out, because we are ourselves affected by the same tradition to which the text belongs, the text as an expression of the past is never entirely unfamiliar to us. Rather, we are already in some sense acquainted with the subject matter that the text addresses and thus in principle capable of understanding the text's meaning. As Gadamer suggests, understanding takes place in the "polarity of familiarity and strangeness" (*ibid.*) constituted by our belongingness to history on the one hand

and by the temporal distance that separates us from the horizon of the text on the other. Experiences take place because of the desire to understand the new, unexpected and unfamiliar that the text articulates in the light of the familiar structure of prejudices that constitutes our being.

This bears upon one of Gadamer's most well-known and controversial concepts, the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*, Gadamer, 2004, 305), which refers to the mediation between the present and the past that takes place in the process of understanding. With the concept of "horizon" (*Horizont*, Gadamer, 2004, 301) Gadamer refers to a particular historical perspective or a view into the world, "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (ibid.). Gadamer (2004, 303) emphasizes that it belongs to the historical nature of our being that our historical horizon is not fixed, but in principle open to other historical viewpoints and therefore continuously transforming, moving and shifting as we come into touch with other horizons and understand them. The concept of horizon also involves a reflective dimension: Gadamer (2004, 301–302) explains that to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond what appears as self-evident. In understanding the historical past, having a horizon in this sense means acquiring a horizon of inquiry that enables the past to appear in its own terms and not merely in terms of our contemporary prejudices and criteria (ibid.).¹² Understanding thus presupposes sensitivity to the otherness and alterity of the other horizon. It requires openness to the claim of truth that the past articulates and especially to the yet unknown dimensions of meaning that arise from the past and do not conform to our own meanings. Understanding the historical past ultimately means allowing the past to *address* us and to present its own claim of truth upon us and our world (Gadamer, 2004, 370). In this sense, understanding means allowing the past to become contemporaneous with us. As Gadamer (2004, 305) himself puts it, "understanding is always a fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves".

Gadamer's critics have often misunderstood the notion of the fusion of horizons and perceived it either as conservative or antagonistic to alterity, otherness and difference (e.g. Caputo, 2000, 58; Figal, 2010, 14). As I emphasized above, however, for Gadamer the process of understanding essentially involves recognizing the otherness of the past, being addressed by it and ultimately being transformed through one's encounters with past horizons.

¹² It is important to point out, however, that understanding the other entirely in its own terms is not a genuine possibility for Gadamer, as according to him we can never leave behind our structure of prejudices as a totality. Hence, Gadamer's (2004, 305) point here is rather that by remaining open to the foreign dimensions of meaning that arise from the text we can become more aware of the presuppositions that govern our *own* understanding.

Hence, the fusion of horizons is not a process of mindless assimilation but rather a reflective interplay and conversation between the different horizons of the present and the past that does not leave either of these horizons intact. In what follows, I will illuminate this idea through Gadamer's conception of the dialogical structure of understanding.

3.3 The dialogical structure of understanding

Gadamer's idea of the dialogical structure of understanding derives from his philosophy of language and particularly from the idea that the nature of language use is dialogical rather than propositional. Instead of representing a world-in-itself, propositions are based on prior linguistic agreements that have been established in tradition through conversation and dialogue. In other words, a word is meaningful not because it simply stands for an object, but rather because its meaning is sanctioned by consensus, agreement and convention (Gadamer, 2004, 443; Grondin, 1994, 117–120; Grondin, 2003, 130).¹³ It is also essential to Gadamer's philosophy that language has its genuine being in coming to an understanding and in reaching an agreement between two people (Gadamer, 2004, 443). Language is the medium through which the communality between people is restored in cases when misunderstandings and disruptions in consensus emerge. As Gadamer (2004, 371) himself states, "to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were".

Another important feature of Gadamer's conception of language is that it is the medium in which the world is expressed and through which human beings have a worldview or a horizon in the first place (Gadamer, 2004, 443). This means that human beings can experience the world only as mediated through language and thus never capture the world as it exists independently of this medium.¹⁴ Accordingly, Gadamer (2004, 444–445) argues that all particular

¹³ As Grondin (1994, 119) points out, Gadamer's dialogical view of language is also in accordance with his critique of the modern scientific orientation that has pervaded all areas of human existence. Namely, Gadamer's philosophy of language represents a move away from the view of language as a means of control and possession to the understanding of language as participation in tradition and in the conversation that we are. As Gadamer has it, language is not something that is in one's conscious control. Therefore it is more correct to say that "language speaks us" (Gadamer, 2004, 459) than that we speak language. According to Gadamer (*ibid.*), there is no knowing and choosing consciousness over and against the development and use of language. Language 'happens' instead of being 'used'.

¹⁴ As Gadamer (2004, 444) explains, in the context of his hermeneutics the whole concept of the "world-in-itself" becomes problematic. He further argues that the criterion for the continuing expansion of our worldview is not given by a "world-in-itself" that lies beyond language. Rather, the infinite perfectibility of the human experience of the world means that whatever language we use we never succeed in grasping anything but an ever more

languages open different perspectives onto the world and thus illuminate different aspects of it. It is crucial, however, that in Gadamer's philosophy this linguistic mediatedness of the world does not relativize it or make different linguistic worldviews radically incommensurable. Gadamer (ibid.) argues that because of their linguistic character, all worldviews are open to expansion into any other view. Therefore, in so far as particular languages illuminate different aspects of the common world, understanding between these linguistic horizons is in principle possible. As Gadamer (2004, 443) points out, the world is like a "disputed object" placed between those communicating – "the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who talk to one another".

As noted above, these views concerning the nature of language are intimately associated with Gadamer's concept of dialogue, which Gadamer primarily addresses through the example of the interpretation of historical texts. Gadamer (2004, 354–355) emphasizes that in order to genuinely understand the past that speaks through the text, we must understand this past as a partner in dialogue, as a person or a "Thou", and allow ourselves to be *addressed* by it. That is, we must understand the horizon of the past as another being who presents its own, potentially valid viewpoint on the subject matter in question. According to Gadamer (2004, 354), understanding the past in this way is important, because a person who seeks to understand the past objectively eliminates the very possibility of learning something from it. Namely, denying one's historical preconditionedness by claiming objectivity does not abolish the influence of prejudices; rather, it only prevents one from examining how exactly such prejudices operate in understanding. Hence, in Gadamer's (2004, 354–355) view, to understand in a genuine sense means to take the claim of truth of the past seriously and, by doing so, to make one's *own* prejudices available for questioning. Only through putting one's own prejudices into play and at risk does one open oneself to the experience of truth involved in understanding (Gadamer, 2004, 299). This is why Gadamer (2004, 365) stresses that dialogue requires a particular kind of openness and humility before the finitude and partiality of human knowledge and before other horizons from which one might learn about the limits of understanding. Gadamer calls this orientation "*Socratic docta ignorantia*" (Gadamer, 2004, 356, emphasis added; see also Gjesdal, 2008, 300), the Socratic knowledge of not knowing.

However, Gadamer stresses that the purpose of the dialogue is not to understand or adopt the views of the past as such. Rather, a genuine dialogue is always directed to *the truth of the subject matter* (*die Sache selbst*, Gadamer, 2004, 361, 369, 371, emphasis added), which is the common aim of the dialogue

extended aspect of the world. Linguistic worldviews are thus not relative in the sense that one could oppose them to the "world-in-itself" as if there was a standpoint outside the human, linguistic world from which the world as it exists independently of language could be captured (ibid.).

by which both partners in discussion are oriented and which is placed between them like a disputed object. Gadamer (2004, 371) emphasizes that the dialogue serves the common aim of reaching an agreement concerning the subject matter rather than that of defending one's own position. Both partners thus give up their subjective positions in favour of finding out the truth regarding the matter at hand. What takes place in a dialogue is a reflective to-and-fro of question and answer, which seeks to find common words and a common language to express what is discovered of the subject matter (Gadamer, 2004, 366–367). The focus on the subject matter is crucial because it motivates the interlocutors to remain open to the other's claim of truth and thus also to risk their own presuppositions. The common focus on the subject matter is thus a precondition for understanding and agreement. However, as Barthold (2010, 4) argues, it does not guarantee unencumbered access to the 'things themselves' and thus it functions as a dialogical constraint rather than an epistemological criterion.

Hermeneutical dialogue results in the *event of truth* that I have described above as the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 2004, 305) – that is, the emergence of a new horizon of meanings or a coming into language of the subject matter. As described above, the event of truth establishes a new communion and a unity of meaning between the two horizons, thereby also giving the subject matter a new articulation. As many commentators have pointed out, despite the centrality of the concept of truth for Gadamer, nowhere in his work does he provide an explicit account of the concept (Bernstein, 1983, 151; Dostal, 1994, 47; Risser, 1994, 123). What is evident, however, is that Gadamer (2004, 484) emphasizes the event-character of truth in order to distinguish it from the view of truth as a static, unchanging or fixed goal towards which understanding progresses.

In my view, the meaning of Gadamer's hermeneutical truth concept is manifold: firstly, truth refers to the significance that the event of understanding has for the interpreter and his or her historical situation. Namely, understanding transforms and broadens the interpreter's horizon, increases his or her self-understanding and therefore opens for him or her new possibilities of understanding. Secondly, however, truth also stands for the deepened and enriched understanding of the subject matter under discussion. Although this understanding must be regarded as representing only a partial, limited and finite truth of the matter, it is nevertheless a truth that surpasses the particular perspectives of the past and the present, as it arises from the reflective dialogue between them and represents a fusion of these horizons previously existing by themselves. As Lawrence Schmidt (1995b, 77) points out, hermeneutical truth is not absolute, but rather the kind of truth that can be reached from a particular historical perspective and through the encounter with another particular horizon. It preserves the possibility of infinite perfectibility of knowledge and recognizes our human finitude and fallibility (ibid.). Thirdly, an often neglected dimension of Gadamer's truth concept is the aforementioned *truth of the subject*

matter – die Sache selbst – that functions as a regulative ideal orienting partners in dialogue and thus enabling understanding and agreement between them. As Barthold (2010, 107) suggests, with this concept, we can read Gadamer as describing an idealized event of understanding that is intimately associated with the readiness to justify oneself to the other. In my view, this meaning of the concept of truth is particularly significant for distinguishing Gadamer's hermeneutics from the radical forms of relativism associated with some of the postmodern philosophies. This concept of truth will be addressed in more depth in chapters 4 and 5.

4 GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS IN DIALOGUE WITH MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

In this chapter, I provide a reinterpretation of the findings of the three studies of this thesis in the light of the modernism-postmodernism debate. My purpose is thus not to reiterate the exact contents of the studies but rather to recontextualize them into the broader framework of this thesis. As I indicated in the introduction, situating Gadamer's philosophy on the modernism-postmodernism axis is anything but a simple or straightforward task. Among other things, Gadamer's hermeneutics has become a target of opposing critiques presented by both modernists and postmodernists (e.g. Schmidt, 1995a). Whereas many prominent representatives of modernism, including Habermas and Apel, have accused Gadamer of jettisoning the concepts of rationality and critique associated with the tradition of the Enlightenment, some postmodernists have claimed that Gadamer remains indebted to the tradition of metaphysics (ibid.). In the three following sections, I examine Gadamer's hermeneutics in relation to Jürgen Habermas's modernist critical theory and John Caputo's and Richard Rorty's postmodern philosophies. Through these examinations, my aim is to demonstrate that especially the notions of rationality and truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics provide a promising starting point for overcoming some of the major philosophical limitations associated with both Habermasian modernism and Caputo's and Rorty's postmodernist approaches.

4.1 Gadamer and Habermas's critical theory

In this section, I examine Gadamer's relationship to Jürgen Habermas's philosophy on the basis of the central findings of studies I and II. Firstly, I address Habermas's critique of Gadamer's hermeneutics presented in the context of the Gadamer-Habermas debate. I particularly focus on the defence of Gadamer's philosophy against Habermas's charges of relativism and conservatism. Secondly, I examine the relationship between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Habermas's later philosophy from the perspective of the concept of rationality. Finally, I discuss the significance of Gadamer's concepts of tradition and rationality for the philosophy of education on the grounds of my findings in study I.

As Bernstein (1986, 345) argues, Habermas can be regarded as the last great rationalist of the Western philosophical tradition and therefore also as one of the most prominent modernists of our time. Habermas (1993) has famously stated that the purpose of his philosophical programme is to continue the still incomplete project of modernity by defending the rational potential of the

modern age against the depiction of modernity as a finished epoch. However, it is noteworthy that Habermas has continuously emphasized the postmetaphysical and postfoundational nature of his philosophy and argued to have established a clear break with the tradition of transcendental philosophy (e.g. Habermas, 1979, 22–23). In this sense, Habermas represents a modest, fallibilist version of modernism or Bernsteinian “objectivism” (Bernstein, 1983, 8).

At the time of the Gadamer-Habermas debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Habermas’s ambition was to establish a critical theory of society that would enable disclosing the pathologies of modern societies and finding remedies to them by the means of philosophical and empirical analysis (see Habermas, 1988). The primary issue of the debate was the question as to whether Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutical understanding can provide sufficient grounds for the critique of ideology.¹⁵ Habermas’s central concern was that Gadamer’s view of the interconnected nature of tradition and hermeneutical reflection jeopardizes the primary purpose of reflection, which is to break the dogmatism of tradition and to subject the claims of tradition to rational scrutiny (Habermas, 1988, 168). According to Habermas (1988, 169–170), the inescapably prejudiced nature of understanding prevents hermeneutical reflection from acquiring critical distance to the tradition that preconditions it. Therefore, hermeneutical reflection becomes inescapably conservative as it is limited to rehabilitating the prejudices that function as conditions of the possibility of understanding. Moreover, Habermas (1986, 314–315) claims that Gadamer’s view of understanding also renders his hermeneutics vulnerable to a historicist form of relativism. Namely, according to him, hermeneutical understanding lacks a tradition-independent principle of rationality on the basis of which the legitimacy of existing traditions could be impartially evaluated.

The argument that I present in both studies I and II is that Habermas’s reading of Gadamer leaves unheeded those dimensions of the concept of hermeneutical understanding that make it inherently reflective and self-critical (Leiviskä, 2015a, 2015b). These dimensions, as I will later argue, also bring Gadamer’s hermeneutics into the proximity of Habermas’s later philosophical views. Gadamer evidently puts more emphasis on the historically preconditioned nature of our existence than Habermas and, accordingly, rejects

¹⁵ The Gadamer-Habermas debate is generally regarded as consisting of the four following essays: the chapter “The Hermeneutic Approach” in Habermas’s *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1988, original 1967); Gadamer’s response “Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology: Metacritical Comments on Truth and Method” (1986, original 1967); Habermas’s second essay “On Hermeneutics’ Claim to Universality” (1986, original 1970); and Gadamer’s final response “Reply to My Critics” (1990, original 1971). For more information on the Gadamer-Habermas debate, see Hekman, 1986; How, 1995; Hoy, 1982; Nicholson, 1991; Teigas, 1995; Scheibler, 2000; Warnke, 1987.

the idea that historical prejudices could be entirely surpassed by methodological means. However, from Gadamer's viewpoint, the historicity of understanding does not make the critical reflection upon existing prejudgments either impossible or unnecessary. Instead, one of the primary reasons for Gadamer's interest in the interpretation of historical texts is the self-reflective potential involved in it (see Gadamer, 2004, 298). As I demonstrate in study I, Gadamer suggests that the temporal distance that separates the interpreter from the historical horizon of the text brings an element of otherness and unfamiliarity into the process of understanding (Leiviskä, 2015a). The otherness of the text enables understanding to take the form of a reflective dialogue between the interpreter and the text and it therefore also allows foregrounding and examining the prejudices that govern understanding. This is the reason why Gadamer (2004, 298) emphasizes the importance of the interpretation of historical texts to our critical self-understanding.

Hence, although Gadamer does not accept the idea of an Archimedean point from which the totality of tradition could be placed under critical reflection at once, he does not deny the possibility of critically evaluating the particular prejudices that are operative in understanding (Leiviskä, 2015a). From this viewpoint, Habermas's interpretation of the inherently conservative and reproductive nature of hermeneutical understanding is accurate only in the very limited sense that understanding cannot step out of its historical situatedness as a whole. Therefore, while we can consciously examine particular dimensions of tradition through dialogical processes of understanding, some other aspects of tradition remain effective without our knowledge of them. This, however, does not mean that these unconsciously operating prejudices could not be subjected to hermeneutical reflection in further processes of understanding. As Gadamer (1986, 284) himself points out in the context of the debate, all linguistic expressions – including ideological ones – are in principle open to hermeneutical understanding as such understanding ultimately encompasses everything that enters the medium of language.

A more difficult question than the issue of conservatism is the one concerning the alleged relativism of Gadamer's hermeneutics. According to Habermas, in order to avoid relativism, Gadamer's hermeneutics would require a tradition-independent principle of rationality equivalent to Habermas's own principle of rational discourse (Habermas, 1986, 314). This issue is addressed in study II in which I examine Gadamer's conception of reason in relation to Habermas's concept of communicative rationality (Leiviskä, 2015b). By the time of the *Theory of Communicative Action* that was originally published in 1981, Habermas had made several significant moderations to the views that he held at the time of the Gadamer-Habermas debate. One of the most important of these moderations was Habermas's emphasis on the postmetaphysical and postfoundational character of his philosophy. As for Gadamer, towards the end

of his career, he became increasingly interested in the social and political relevance of the hermeneutical processes of understanding. Hence, as Richard Bernstein (1986, 348) points out, in his later philosophy, Gadamer began to sound more and more like Habermas, whereas the mature Habermas can be seen as endorsing distinctively hermeneutical views. Evidently, the questions and motivations underlying Habermas's and Gadamer's philosophical projects were still very different. Whereas Habermas's major work *The Theory of Communicative Action* can be understood as an attempt to continue the project of the Enlightenment in the field of critical theory of society, Gadamer's philosophy is founded upon his critique of the Enlightenment. Despite these differences, the argument that I develop in study II is that the conceptions of rationality that arise from these philosophical projects sustain significant similarities (Leiviskä, 2015b).

As I explain in study II, Habermas's concept of communicative rationality refers to the rational core of the linguistic practices of modern societies and particularly to the counterfactual presuppositions of communicative action and argumentation (Leiviskä, 2015b). When Habermas developed the notion of communicative rationality, his aim was to establish a non-relativistic concept of reason that is nevertheless compatible with the postmetaphysical and postfoundationalist currents of thought of twentieth-century philosophy (Cooke, 1997, 4; Healy, 2007, 137). In Habermas's philosophy, the notions of postmetaphysicality and postfoundationalism are associated with several different features of communicative rationality: firstly, Habermas rejects the idea of subjective consciousness as the foundation of rationality and replaces this view with the idea of the inherently rational character of linguistic, intersubjective practices. Secondly, he abandons the idea of abstract rationality that can be captured independently of the contingent, historical and social practices (Habermas, 1994, 39–48; see also Cooke, 1997, 38–40). Thirdly, communicative rationality is procedural instead of substantial, which means that it does not concern the rationality of the substantial norms or propositions *per se* but rather the rationality of the *procedure* for testing their validity (Habermas, 1994, 34–39; see also Cooke, 1997, 38–40). Moreover, Habermas (1990, 16) also suggests that philosophy can no longer have the role of the “supreme judge” that establishes the foundations of knowledge. Rather, philosophy must be perceived as providing knowledge from a participant perspective of linguistic practices. This idea has led Habermas (1990, 15; Cooke, 1997, 39) to describe philosophy as a “stand-in” or a “placeholder” for the most basic normative presuppositions underlying distinctly modern forms of life.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid relativism and defeatism, Habermas also aims to demonstrate that communicative rationality is not merely another cultural and contextual conception of reason. Habermas therefore argues that communicative rationality is a species-wide feature of linguistic competence or

an implicit know-how common to all linguistically competent, rational subjects (e.g. Habermas, 1984, 137; see also McCarthy, 1982, 60). He also seeks to illustrate that argumentation is an unavoidable feature of all linguistic communities and that participation in argumentative practices requires tacitly mastering the idealizing presuppositions of communicative action.¹⁶ In this context, following Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas also introduces the famous transcendental-pragmatic argument according to which the participants in argumentation cannot refute these idealizing presuppositions without falling into performative contradiction (e.g. Habermas, 1990, 86–94, 100).¹⁷ According to Habermas, communicative rationality is thus a *universal* and an *unavoidable* feature of linguistic competence which, however, only gradually manifests itself in the course of the rationalization of societies (e.g. Habermas, 1984, 138, emphasis added). Moreover, another important means of defeating relativism for Habermas is the argument concerning the unconditionality of validity claims (Habermas, 2003, 99). By this, Habermas (ibid.) refers to the idea that although factual discourses can only yield more or less well-grounded agreements, the claims of truth and morality made by the participants of a discourse always transcend all contingent and factual contexts of justification, thereby claiming *unconditional validity*. According to Habermas (2003, 99–101), the idea of unconditionality is necessary in order to sustain the distinction between facticity and validity. Without such an idea, validity would be reduced to coherence with currently held norms and beliefs.

In study II, the concept of communicative rationality described above is paralleled with the Gadamerian notion of dialogical rationality (Leiviskä, 2015b). Although Gadamer does not use the concept of dialogical rationality himself, this notion has been utilized by his commentators in order to emphasize the dialogical and justificatory nature of Gadamer's concept of understanding (Bernstein, 1986, 350; Gjesdal, 2009, 11; 2010, 67). Following these interpretations, with the concept of dialogical rationality, I refer to such features of processes of understanding that enable the reflective examination of prejudices and that therefore contribute to the possibility of arriving at justified

¹⁶ Habermas (1990, 89) has outlined these idealizing presuppositions particularly clearly in his essay "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Programme of Philosophical Justification": (1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse; (2a) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever; (2b) Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse; (2c) Everyone is allowed to express his or her attitudes, desires, and needs; (3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his or her rights as laid down in (1) and (2a–c).

¹⁷ By performative contradiction, Habermas (1990, 88–89) refers to the following idea: when one enters into a discourse or an argumentation, one has already made certain assumptions and committed oneself to certain norms that characterize a discourse. Therefore one cannot argue against those same norms without performatively contradicting oneself. The purpose of the argument is thus to demonstrate the inescapable or unavoidable nature of the idealizing presuppositions of argumentation.

interpretations by the way of dialogue. These features involve (1) openness to the claims of truth of others and willingness to test one's prejudices; (2) engagement in the interplay of giving and asking for reasons; and, finally, (3) the regulative ideal of the truth of the subject matter as the focus of the dialogue.

The concept of dialogical rationality is based on similar postmetaphysical and postfoundational premises as Habermas's notion of communicative rationality. Like Habermas's concept, Gadamer's notion of dialogical rationality can be seen as describing the reasonableness or the rational potential embedded in our everyday linguistic practices (Bernstein, 1983). Accordingly, Gadamer (2004, 385) argues that our reasoning is not based on subjective consciousness or conducted by individual subjectivities – rather, we are drawn into intersubjective processes of understanding and dialogue through our attempts to make sense of the other. Furthermore, Gadamer (2004, 282) has continuously emphasized the interrelated nature of tradition and reason and highlighted the situatedness of hermeneutical reflection in the concrete historical circumstances in which we always already find ourselves. Gadamer also insists that because our knowledge of the world is restricted to what can be attained through contextual and embedded processes of understanding, all interpretations must be regarded as finite, fallible, partial and open to further interpretation in other contexts.

As I argue in study II, despite the profoundly postfoundational orientation of Gadamer's hermeneutics, certain features of Gadamer's concept of dialogical rationality distance his philosophy from the kind of relativism that Habermas associates with it (Leiviskä, 2015b). Namely, at the core of the hermeneutical dialogue is the ideal of the truth of the subject matter (*die Sache selbst*) that transcends the given context of interpretation and thus creates a similar distinction between facticity and validity as advocated by Habermas (e.g. Barthold, 2010, 107). In this context, the truth of the subject matter refers to the regulative ideal orienting understanding – that is, the shared goal of truth and agreement that allows the dialogue partners to reach beyond their particular horizons towards an enriched, deepened and a more justified understanding of the subject matter. As Healy (2007, 151) suggests, Gadamer never eschews the possibility of or the need for a regulative truth concept capable of giving motivation and direction to the dialogical processes of understanding. Rather, Gadamer insists upon the necessity of the dialogue partners to justify themselves to the other and to surrender their particular positions to the mutual aim of truth (Barthold, 2010, 106). As I argue in study II, this idea of dialogue as a justificatory process that is oriented by a regulative concept of truth is central for defeating the accusations of relativism associated with Gadamer's philosophy (Leiviskä, 2015b).

Moreover, like Habermas, Gadamer also perceives the rational potential embedded in dialogical language use as something universal rather than characteristic of specific cultures or historical time periods (e.g. Gadamer, 1986,

284). Gadamer's more or less explicit argument is that because of the universal dialogical structure of language use, understanding always involves the possibility of arriving at rationally motivated agreements by the way of dialogue (Scheibler, 2000, 63). This evidently does not mean that such rational potential is always or necessarily realized in understanding. On the contrary, as Gadamer (2004, 354) argues, a genuine dialogue requires a fundamental kind of openness, humility and willingness to put one's current pre-understanding at risk. The reason Gadamer is so concerned about the intrusion of the objectivistic self-understanding of modern sciences into other areas of human existence is precisely that it prevents this kind of openness and therefore hinders the realization of the rational potential involved in understanding (see Gadamer, 1981a, 1981b, 1998c).

As I suggest in study II, the aforementioned features bring the Gadamerian concept of dialogical rationality into the proximity of Habermas's notion of communicative rationality and thus also refute or at least significantly weaken the accusations of relativism often directed against Gadamer's hermeneutics (Leiviskä, 2015b). The critical argument that I develop against Habermas in study II is that certain qualities of Habermas's own philosophical project compromise the postfoundational orientation that he claims to endorse (Leiviskä, 2015b). These qualities have to do with the way Habermas continuously balances between the transcendental and pragmatic features of his philosophical programme, thus rendering his philosophy vulnerable to the kind of foundationalism that he aims to avoid (Bernstein, 1983, 193–195). For instance, Karl-Otto Apel (1992, 128) argues that Habermas's theory is openly inconsistent, as Habermas seeks to hold on to both, the postfoundational and empirical nature of his philosophical programme *and* the strong justificatory function traditionally associated with Kantian philosophy. Apel (ibid.) argues that the counterfactual presuppositions of communicative action cannot be understood as fallible, testable or falsifiable – instead, these presuppositions must be regarded as *a priori valid*. Consequently, Apel (1992, 150) claims that Habermas *de facto* follows a stronger strategy of justification that he would like to admit. Apel (ibid.) points out that in the works published after *The Theory of Communicative Action*, including *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985/1998), Habermas relies primarily on the so called performative contradiction argument, which is a justificatory strategy strongly indebted to Kantian transcendentalism. Richard Bernstein (1983, 193–195) and Thomas McCarthy (1982, 62) have made similar remarks suggesting that Habermas occasionally uses such concepts and language that connect his project to Kantian transcendental philosophy, which evidently brings into question the empirical, hypothetical and fallible nature of Habermas's philosophy.

Because of these ambiguities that place into question the postfoundational character of Habermas's philosophy, I argue in study II that Gadamer's

hermeneutics might provide a more plausible point of departure for developing a notion of rationality that is both postfoundational and non-relativistic (Leiviskä, 2015b). Moreover, as I further suggest in study II, when Habermas's concept of communicative rationality is given a modest interpretation that renounces the aforementioned foundationalist features, this interpretation arrives at the proximity of Gadamer's notion of dialogical rationality. As Bernstein (1983, 195) points out, from this modest, hermeneutical viewpoint the notion of rationality does not have the status of an ultimate justification or a new scientific programme. Rather, it can be regarded as an insight into humanity and its prospects, which only calls for our acceptance because of the overall plausibility that it gives (ibid.).

Finally, I now assess the educational relevance of the Gadamerian concept of dialogical rationality outlined above. In study I, I suggest that Gadamer's idea of the interrelated nature of tradition and reason allows bringing forth the neglected significance of the concept of *tradition* for the philosophy of education (Leiviskä, 2015a). As I indicate in the study, in the philosophy of education, the idea of learning as an introduction to traditions or to the views of the past is often perceived as conservative and thus incompatible with the educational aim of fostering rationality (ibid.). My argument in study I is that through challenging the opposition between tradition and reason, Gadamer's philosophy allows illuminating the genuine significance of tradition for education and learning (ibid.). Namely, Gadamer suggests that, instead of a dogmatic and irrational force, tradition is a *conversational partner* from which we may learn.

As I indicate in study I, Gadamer's understanding of tradition and its value for the present departs dramatically from the kind of conservatism that regards tradition as an absolute source of validity (Leiviskä, 2015a). Namely, as Bernstein (1983, 153) points out, from a Gadamerian perspective, the truth that we can derive from our tradition is essentially a *discursive* truth, which must be justified and warranted through dialogue and against the views that we ourselves currently hold. Hence, we do not read Aristotle or Plato simply to adopt and preserve their views, but we read them because we believe that our reflective discussions with these views might teach us something important about ourselves and the world. From Gadamer's perspective, tradition is thus not only a medium of being in which we always already find ourselves, but the different horizons of the past are also conversational partners that can illuminate our prevailing presuppositions and thus allow for their reflective examination (Hogan, 2010). As Pádraig Hogan (2010, 129) points out, learning from the past is an on-going to-and-fro between one's own assumptions and those of a previously unencountered world of belief and action, which provides fresh inspirations for a challenging and deepening of one's self-understanding (ibid.).

Hence, although Gadamer emphasizes the historical embeddedness of all human practices, including education and learning, he simultaneously stresses

that tradition is not a fixed precondition that has a dogmatic hold on us, but it is rather *in relationship with us* and thus plays a central role in our critical self-understanding (Gadamer, 2004, 293, 352). Namely, although we are temporal beings and cannot fully distance ourselves from the pregiven tradition that conditions us, achieving a critical perspective on our historicity is nevertheless possible through our encounters with those who belong to tradition and history but who are also different from us (Leiviskä, 2015a; see also Warnke, 2012, 17). In other words, from a Gadamerian viewpoint, reflecting upon one's historical situatedness requires sensitivity and openness to the otherness of the past and its ability to tell us something different from what we already think we know (Warnke, 2012, 17). From this perspective, the significance of Gadamer's views on tradition and reason for the philosophy of education lies in demonstrating that encountering horizons of the past in different educational contexts and settings, far from being conservative, plays an important role in fostering rationality and self-knowledge. I will return to this idea in the next section where I address the educational relevance of the Gadamerian concept of *phronesis*.

Interestingly, despite the similarities involved in Gadamer's and Habermas's notions of rationality, Habermas categorically rejects the aforementioned idea of tradition as a conversational partner and as a possible source of truth. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981/1984), Habermas famously introduces his theory of the rationalization of societies from the perspective of which the historical past can only be understood as a lower stage in the process of rationalization and therefore less advanced than contemporary modern societies. From a Gadamerian viewpoint, Habermas's understanding of the nature of history is potentially distortive of knowledge, as it elevates modernity above other historical ages and thus prevents the present from learning from the horizons of the past about the deformations and deficiencies of today's world and society. As Warnke (2012, 16) points out, from a Gadamerian perspective, rather than a relationship between a higher and a lower stage, our relationship with the past is similar to the relationship between friends and between those in solidarity with one another. Just like friends reveal each other to one another, so too does the past help structure the way we understand the present and, hence, what we hand down to future generations as the past.

4.2 Gadamer and Caputo's radical hermeneutics

In this section, I focus on the relationship of Gadamer's hermeneutics to another postmetaphysical philosophy discussed in study II: John Caputo's radical hermeneutics. I particularly address Caputo's critique of Gadamer's concept of *phronesis* and present my own interpretation of this notion, which significantly departs from Caputo's understanding of it. Moreover, I also illuminate the significance of the Gadamerian concept of *phronesis* for the philosophy of

education and thus continue the discussion concerning the educational relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics initiated in the previous section.

Along with the confrontation between Gadamer and Derrida, Caputo's critique of Gadamer is one of the most well-known encounters between postmodern and philosophical hermeneutics. Caputo is a follower of Heidegger's and Derrida's philosophies and advocates their critique of the so called metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy. One of the important dimensions of Caputo's project, which he refers to as *radical hermeneutics*, consists of an attempt to redefine the concept of rationality from a postmetaphysical perspective.¹⁸ Caputo (1987, 227) argues that the way reason has been raised to the status of a principle in the tradition of metaphysics has reduced it to rule-governed processes and fixed decision procedures, which can be utilized as instruments of discipline and control. Caputo's radical hermeneutics thus aims to emancipate the idea of reason from the metaphysical prejudices involved in it and to cultivate an acute sense of the contingency of all social, historical and linguistic structures (Caputo, 1987, 209). As Caputo himself argues, his aim is not to jettison the concept of reason but rather to redefine it in a manner that takes into consideration the futility of all attempts to "nail things down" (Caputo, 1987, 211). For Caputo, the only sensible way to define reason is in terms of "a free, creative movement" or "play" (ibid.). By these notions, he refers to the activity of making unorthodox suggestions to existing paradigms, breaking established habits of thought and defending the freedom of reason against all attempts to capture it in fixed principles (Caputo, 1987, 227).

As indicated in study II, Caputo (1987, 110–111, 210) perceives Gadamer's rehabilitation of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* as an attempt analogous to his own to redefine reason from a postmetaphysical perspective. He correctly recognizes that, in Gadamer's hermeneutics, reason is emancipated from the rule of method and reinterpreted in a manner that takes into account the plasticity and flexibility involved in situated, historical understanding (Caputo, 1987, 110, 210). His critical argument is, however, that despite its seemingly historical orientation, Gadamer's notion of *phronesis* is ultimately based on the idea of the transmission of fixed, eternal truths or meanings (Caputo, 1987, 110, 113–115). Caputo (1987, 113) suggests that the Gadamerian concept of *die Sache*, the subject matter, stands for such ahistorical truths or essences. He further argues that the real question motivating Gadamer's philosophical project is how these ahistorical truths and meanings are passed on and transmitted in

¹⁸ For Caputo, the term 'postmetaphysical' has a profoundly different meaning than it does for Habermas. Whereas Habermas sustains the universality of reason and endorses the modernist ideals of truth, objectivity and consensus, Caputo advocates a far more postmodern orientation. For Caputo, a postmetaphysical approach refers to the radical critique of such foundational and principled thinking that Heidegger and Derrida associated with the tradition of metaphysics.

understanding in a manner that secures the deep unity and continuity of tradition (Caputo, 1987, 111). According to Caputo (ibid.), Hegelian dialectics and Platonic dialogues are important for Gadamer mainly for the reason that he perceives dialogue and dialectics as the primary means for transmitting the ageless contents of tradition. Caputo (1987, 111) argues that the central difference between Gadamer and Hegel is not that Gadamer's philosophy lacks an absolute but rather that Gadamer recognizes that the very structure of history "prevents the absolute instantiation of the absolute". Because of this, in Gadamer's philosophy, the self-same truth can only be expressed in historical terms and captured in inexhaustibly new ways in different historical situations (ibid.). Caputo (1987, 115) concludes that Gadamer's thinking represents a modified, historical form of Hegelianism and thus it remains fundamentally attached to "the metaphysics of recollection and mediation", which "dulls the edge of destruction and deconstruction".

As I argue in study II, Caputo's reading of Gadamer described above disregards the central purpose of Gadamer's rehabilitation of the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, which is precisely to highlight the inescapably contextual and historical nature of understanding (Leiviskä, 2015b). Gadamer emphasizes that understanding the meaning of the text or some other embodiment of tradition in some universal, ahistorical or objective sense is impossible, because understanding always arises from the prejudices and questions connected to the interpreter's particular historical situation (e.g. Gadamer, 2004, 300). Accordingly, the text does not have any meaning outside its concrete, historical interpretations, as it only receives such meaning through its concretization in the event of understanding. This is why Gadamer (2004, 306) insists that understanding is inherently *applicative* by which he means that we inescapably understand the text's meaning as always already applied to ourselves and to our situation. For Gadamer, the primary purpose of the concept of *phronesis* is thus to emphasize that our reasoning is not something foreign to or independent of our concrete existence in history.

Granted, Gadamer emphasizes that understanding is always directed to "the truth of the subject matter" (*die Sache selbst*, Gadamer, 2004, 369). However, in the context of Gadamer's hermeneutics, the concept of *die Sache* does not refer to some fixed or pregiven essence handed down by tradition, as Caputo (1987, 113) seems to suggest. Rather, *die Sache* or the subject matter is simply the common reference point between the interpreter and the text that enables understanding in the first place. As Gadamer (2004, 295) points out, because we ourselves are affected by history, we are always already in some sense familiar with the subject matter that the text concerns and thus in principle capable of understanding the text's meaning. However, if we bring to mind the idea that understanding is a *dialogical* process that occurs in the dialogical interplay between the interpreter and the text, it becomes evident that the nature and the

meaning of *die Sache* is not something fixed or predetermined but rather being worked out and negotiated in the course of the dialogue. The truth of the subject matter is thus an ideal goal of dialogue that points beyond the interpreter's pre-given horizon and motivates the interpreter to enter into a dialogue with the text, to put his or her own preconceptions at risk and to justify him or herself in the light of the truth claims that the text presents. In this sense, as Barthold (2010, 102) argues, the focus on *die Sache* distinguishes genuine dialogues from other forms of conversation as it secures the fundamental openness of understanding and prevents it from becoming arbitrary or idiosyncratic. Bernstein (1983, 151) expresses the same thing as he points out that the appeal to truth is what enables us to go beyond our own historical horizon through a fusion of horizons. Hence, this dimension of truth is absolutely essential in order to distinguish philosophical hermeneutics from a historicist form of relativism (ibid.).

In my view, Caputo misinterprets Gadamer's notion of *phronesis* precisely because he does not fully capture the genuinely dialogical nature of the concept. Accordingly, he does not understand the role that the concept of truth plays in dialogical processes of understanding. For Gadamer, the dimension of truth is important for demonstrating that despite its applicative nature, understanding is never solely self-interested or locked into a perspective. That is, the aim of understanding is not to interpret the text according to our own criteria, but rather to engage in a common pursuit of truth and meaning with the text, thereby also putting our own prejudices into play. At the same time, however, Gadamer emphasizes that what can actually be attained through processes of understanding is not an absolute, ahistorical truth but the truth mediated by our concrete existence in history. Namely, it is our interpretative situation and the prejudices connected to it that enable understanding in the first place (Gadamer, 2004, 398). This dialectical interplay between the universal and the particular dimensions of understanding – between the truth that we pursue in a dialogue and our own historical situation – is what Gadamer aims to capture with the notion of *phronesis*.

Caputo's misinterpretation of the notion of *phronesis* also characterizes his understanding of the political implications of the concept: as I point out in study II, both Caputo (1987, 210–211) and Bernstein (1983, 157) argue that Gadamer's concept of *phronesis* is ultimately incompatible with the conditions of contemporary societies, because the concept rests upon an idea of a pre-given paradigm or a "world already in place" (Caputo, 1987, 210) which, according to them, is irreversibly lost in today's plural societies. In my view, however, the way Gadamer associates *phronesis* with the idea of dialogue adds a new dimension to the Aristotelian concept that makes it much more plausible from a contemporary perspective. Namely, in Gadamer's interpretation of *phronesis*, the idea of a fixed paradigm or a pre-existing truth is replaced with the idea of a

consensus that is being sought after in the course of the dialogue. Hence, for Gadamer, the paradigm or the tradition that *phronesis* rests upon is not fixed or predetermined, but it is rather something that is continuously revised, reinterpreted and reconstructed within dialogical encounters between different horizons and perspectives.

As I point out in study II, as Caputo's philosophy lacks a concept of truth parallel to Gadamer's, it is difficult to see how Caputo himself is able to escape from radically relativistic, idiosyncratic or arbitrary consequences (Leiviskä, 2015b). Caputo argues that he does not want to jettison reason and is emphatic that interpretation is not arbitrary, but if rationality has no goal other than "coping with the flux" (Caputo, 1987, 213) what exactly is the meaning of reason? What makes the transformation and disruption of existing paradigms specifically *rational*? As Paul Fairfield (2011, 200) points out, when it comes to identifying the conditions that would render understanding rational, Caputo offers merely negative descriptions. As I argue in study II, without some positive, constructive understanding of what it means to be rational and how it is possible to arrive at justified interpretations, the concept of rationality loses its critical potential and ultimately becomes meaningless (Leiviskä, 2015b). In my view, the strength of Gadamer's concept of *phronesis* is precisely that it sustains the critical potential of reason *without* making such metaphysical or essentialist assumptions that Caputo mistakenly associates with Gadamer's hermeneutics. Hence, the argument that I present in study II is that we can sustain the non-dogmatism and openness of reason that Caputo strives for from Gadamer's more moderate standpoint and simultaneously avoid the arbitrariness that Caputo's own philosophy appears to be vulnerable to (Leiviskä, 2015b).

In study I, I discuss the educational relevance of Gadamer's notion of *phronesis* and suggest that the concept is particularly fruitful for understanding the educational aim of rationality without losing sight of the profoundly historical and contextual nature of education and learning (Leiviskä, 2015a). As I indicate in the study, education is always already embedded in the medium of tradition and effected by history (*ibid.*). What follows from this is that education both intentionally and unintentionally transmits traditional contents to learners, thus endowing them with historical preunderstandings. From a Gadamerian perspective, however, it also belongs to the historicity of human existence that each generation understands tradition from the viewpoint of its unique historical situation and thus differently from previous generations. Hence, what is demanded of learners and what education ultimately aims to foster is the kind of situated rationality – *phronesis* – that allows learners to form reasonable reinterpretations of the subject matters mediated through tradition (*ibid.*).

As Shaun Gallagher (1992, 150) points out, such situated reasoning or learning is always faced with two normative claims: one by the object of

interpretation and one by the interpreter's own circumstance. In other words, learning is codetermined by the learner's unique historical situation – that is, the specific issues, interests and requirements associated with it – and the subject matter being learned. Learning is an attempt to responsibly bridge between these demands or an endeavour to resolve, in a meaningful way, the tension created by the uniqueness of the learner's historical situation and the subject matter transmitted through tradition. An idea of learning that merely appropriates and reproduces tradition is not only dogmatic and conservative but also a bad caricature of Gadamerian thinking. At the same time, however, reasonable learning cannot simply make an aspect of tradition or the subject matter to fit one's current circumstance, as new interpretations of a given subject matter always build upon old ones and make use of the knowledge of the limitations and deficiencies involved in past interpretations. In other words, while learning is preconditioned by the tradition of interpretations that has gone before it also strives for new, enriched and deepened understandings of a given subject matter.

Notably, the learner never encounters some abstract 'subject matter' in education but, instead, what is handed down to the learner is a particular historical interpretation of a given subject matter in the form of a text or some other embodiment of tradition. Therefore, *phronetic* learning takes the form of *a dialogue* or a conversation between the learner and the particular historical horizon of the text (Leiviskä, 2015a; see also Gallagher, 1992, 154). Hence, the two normative demands that the learner faces are ultimately the claim of truth arising from one's own prejudices on the one hand and from the horizon of the text on the other. *Phronetic* learning thus means allowing one's own prejudices to be questioned by the text and, vice versa, questioning and evaluating the claims of truth of the text against one's own prejudices. Moreover, as I have emphasized, in order to be rational along the lines suggested by *phronesis*, such learning is always oriented by the regulative ideal of the truth of the subject matter that allows the learner to strive for such understanding and agreement with the text that overcomes the particularities of both horizons and discloses previously unknown dimensions of meaning.

The outcome of such learning is a new interpretation of a given subject matter under discussion, which also represents an increase in the learner's freedom and self-understanding. This interpretation, however, is only a temporal achievement in the unending process of learning, as it will inevitably be overcome and replaced as the learner's horizon shifts through further processes of learning. As I indicated earlier through Gadamer's concept of experience, each event of understanding transforms the learner in a manner that every new process of learning begins with a different hermeneutical situation and thus brings about a different dialogue. Therefore, processes of learning must be regarded as radically open-ended and also as engendering inexhaustibly new

interpretations of different subject matters. In this sense, learning does not strive for any pre-given, ahistorical or fixed end, but it is rather an end in itself and a continuous task for human beings. Gadamer (2004, 15) himself has described this fundamental open-endedness of learning through his notion of *Bildung*, by which he means the continuous endeavour of humans to rise above their partiality toward greater universality and communality.

The relevance of Gadamer's concept of *phronesis* to the philosophy of education thus lies in demonstrating that the rationality that education aims to foster is not something foreign to the historical being of humans. Rather, it is something that can only be employed from a participant perspective of a historical tradition and in the light of one's historical situation. Fostering *phronesis* in education ultimately means fostering openness toward other historical horizons and their claims of truth through which the learner may gain a deepened understanding of one's own historical situation and of the subject matter at hand. Moreover, fostering *phronesis* must also involve familiarizing the learners with the finitude and partiality of the views and interpretations that they encounter in education, as it is not these particular interpretations that they must accept and conform to. Rather, the claims of truth arising from these other historical horizons should be understood as invitations to enter into dialogues with them in which a common understanding of the world that lies before both conversational partners can be pursued. Hence, the ideal of truth that orients our dialogues with different embodiments of tradition is not the learner's, the educator's or the tradition's truth, but rather a truth where all these horizons could meet on common ground.

4.3 Gadamer and Rorty's neopragmatism

In this section, I examine the relationship between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Richard Rorty's neopragmatism on the basis of the findings of study III. I particularly focus on the topics of the philosophy of science and science education, which were addressed in the study. My aim is to demonstrate that, despite some important similarities in Gadamer's and Rorty's philosophies, there are also differences in these approaches that are central from the viewpoint of the philosophy of science as well as science education. I suggest that the most important of these differences is that Gadamer sustains the notion of truth as the regulative ideal of inquiry, while Rorty adopts a far more pragmatic orientation. I argue that Rorty's neopragmatic approach is ultimately insufficient for motivating the openness and non-dogmatism of scientific research and for promoting the kind of expansion of one's community of justification that Rorty himself advocates.

Rorty became a prominent figure in late twentieth-century philosophy after the publication of his main work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in 1979.

In this book, Rorty establishes his famous anti-foundationalism,¹⁹ which refers to the idea that there is no neutral framework of inquiry or a foundation of knowledge on the basis of which justified beliefs can be distinguished from unjustified ones. Rather, all criteria and procedures of justification must be regarded as local and inherent in a given community (Rorty, 1980). Underlying Rorty's anti-foundationalism is the rejection of the "mirror theory of knowledge" (ibid.) by which Rorty refers to the idea that there is an intrinsically veridical relationship between mind or language and the world. Rorty thus discards the representational view of language and seeks to replace it with the pragmatist idea of different vocabularies as alternative modes of adaptation to the world.

Rorty has also employed these basic ideas established in his main work in his critique of the natural sciences. In his essay "Science as Solidarity", Rorty (1991b, 35) challenges the idea of the natural sciences as disciplines capable of providing objective knowledge of the world or of having insights into the intrinsic nature of reality. He argues that there is no reason to think of sciences as having a privileged access to the nature in itself or as being any more objective or rational than any other discipline (Rorty, 1991b, 39). Accordingly, Rorty (1991c, 48–49) also claims that the world does not provide a normative constraint on our belief systems. Therefore, there is no way to determine the superiority of one scientific paradigm over another, to translate relevant proportions of one vocabulary into another or even argue against one paradigm on the basis of the beliefs of another (ibid.). All these claims are interlinked with Rorty's suggestion that we should ultimately reject such notions as 'truth' or 'world' as the goals of scientific research and replace them with the attempt to enlarge one's own community of justification (Rorty, 1991b, 41; 1995, 298). The view that Rorty (1991a, 23) refers to as "ethnocentrism" is also closely related to these arguments. Rorty (ibid.) describes ethnocentrism as the conviction that "there is nothing to be said about either truth or justification apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society – ours – uses in one or another area of inquiry". Rorty (1991a, 30) thus accepts the idea of "a lonely provincialism" – that is, the idea that we are unable to justify ourselves to people who are very different from us and therefore there will be an inevitable distinction between "the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others" (ibid.).

As I have suggested earlier, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics also represents a form of postfoundationalism: as all knowledge claims and forms of understanding are fundamentally historical and linguistic, there is no neutral foundation upon which these claims and forms can be conclusively justified. The denial of the possibility of such a foundation is the very backbone of Gadamer's philosophical project. Gadamer (2004) also emphasizes the linguistic

¹⁹ In this context, I use Rorty's (1980) own term "anti-foundationalism", which bears similarities to but is not identical with the postfoundationalism that Gadamer endorses.

mediatedness of our worldview by which he means that we can only experience and understand the world as it is expressed through the medium of language. Moreover, Gadamer criticizes the expansion of the methodical orientation of the natural sciences into other areas of human existence, including the human sciences (e.g. Gadamer, 1981b, 2004). In the light of these Gadamerian ideas, it is not surprising that in the *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Rorty (1980, 360) presents Gadamer's hermeneutics as a model for his own philosophical project. Rorty (ibid.) argues that Gadamer shares his view of the "edifying" nature of philosophy as opposed to its more traditional, "systematic" function. Edification – Rorty's translation of the German term *Bildung* – as a philosophical attitude stands for the rejection of the epistemological preoccupation with truth and justification in favour of a conversational attitude. According to Rorty (ibid.), fostering conversation, inventing new narratives and exploring different possibilities and modes of self-description is a sufficient aim for philosophy. Rorty (1980, 359) argues that, like himself, Gadamer also adopts an attitude "interested not so much in what is out there in the world, or in what happened in history, as in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses". However, as Bernstein (1983, 201), Robert Dostal (1987, 423) and Warnke (1987, 146, 161–166) among others have argued, there are significant differences in Gadamer's and Rorty's philosophies that distinguish Gadamer from the kind of radical renunciation of truth that Rorty's philosophy represents.²⁰

As indicated earlier, according to Gadamer, understanding is always directed to the truth of the subject matter or *die Sache selbst*. As Dostal (1987, 428) suggests, for Gadamer, the notion of the subject matter is a regulative ideal or a *telos* for speech and dialogue and, in its largest possible sense, it refers to the assumption of a common world. According to David Weberman (1999, 325) Gadamer holds that understanding is not a dyadic, but a triadic relation – that is, it is not a relation simply between text and reader or between one interlocutor and another, but between two thinking subjects and the truth about some subject matter. Therefore, conversational as well as textual understanding occurs by grasping and evaluating the other's words in the light of the truth about the way things are or should be (ibid.). In this context, however, the truth of the subject matter does not refer to something that lies beyond the interpretational human world. Rather, as Nicholas Davey (2006, 70) suggests, *die Sache* is a continuity of interpretations which in coalescing over time forms a common cultural theme or a reference point. Hence, it is an ideal construct formed from a cluster of

²⁰ In this context, I will highlight somewhat different aspects of Gadamer's philosophy than initially introduced in study III. Namely, I want to emphasize here that Gadamer's commitment to the idea of a common world and the view of understanding as a pursuit of truth can be seen as features that clearly distinguish Gadamer's hermeneutics from Rortyan thinking.

evolving perspectives.²¹ It is characteristic of a subject matter that it cannot be exhausted by any single interpretation and that it does not have any fixed being, but it is rather continuously transforming and shifting through new interpretations. In this sense, *die Sache* is not an object of investigation but, as Dostal (1987, 421) points out, it is an enterprise in which we ourselves participate. The fact that understanding is directed to the truth of the subject matter therefore does not mean that understanding can grasp the world-in-itself unmediated by language. For Gadamer, the relevance of the concept of *die Sache* is rather that it provides a common ground or reference point for the interlocutors and thus prevents the dissolution of understanding into a mere juxtaposition between different interpretations (Vasterling, 2003, 164). Hence, although every worldview can provide only a partial and limited perspective onto the world, the assumption that all linguistic interpretations are nevertheless about the same subject matter or the same world and seek to disclose its truth enables dialogue and conversation between these different worldviews. The world or the subject matter is, as Gadamer (2004, 443) states, like a disputed object set before those communicating. “It is the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who talk to one another” (ibid.).

My argument is that this Gadamerian ideal of truth departs radically from Rorty’s ethnocentric orientation. Namely, Rorty’s idea seems to be that as we can never actually separate between truth and what we are justified in believing within a given community, we should abandon the notion of truth or assimilate it with what is justified based on *our* criteria (Rorty, 1991a, 23; 1991b, 38). In contrast to this, although Gadamer also accepts that we have no access to the world-in-itself, he insists that the regulative ideal of the truth of the subject matter – that is, the ideal of a common, linguistically mediated view of the world – remains crucial for understanding. Namely, it secures the openness of

²¹ It is important to acknowledge that Gadamer rejects both direct realism as well as Kantian representationalism. Accordingly, the concept of *die Sache selbst* should not be confused with the Kantian thing-in-itself, which stands outside the world of interpretation. As Gadamer (2004, 444; see also Dostal, 1987, 420; 2012, 59) himself indicates, *die Sache selbst* is a phenomenological concept that he adopts from Husserl: “Seen phenomenologically, the ‘thing-in-itself’ is, as Husserl has shown, nothing but the continuity with which the various perceptual perspectives on objects shade into one another [...]. In the same way as with perception we can speak of the ‘linguistic shadings’ that the world undergoes in different language-worlds. But there remains a characteristic difference: every ‘shading’ of the object of perception is exclusively distinct from every other, and each helps co-constitute the ‘thing-in-itself’ as the continuum of these nuances—whereas, in the case of the shadings of verbal worldviews, each one potentially contains every other one within it—i.e., each worldview can be extended into every other. It can understand and comprehend, from within itself, the ‘view’ of the world presented in another language” (Gadamer, 2004, 444–445). Based on this Husserl-inspired description, *die Sache selbst* is the continuum or the totality of mutually inclusive worldviews or, differently put, the fusion of horizons between all possible perspectival views on the subject matter.

understanding, motivates dialogue between rival perspectives and paradigms and ultimately makes understanding between these perspectives possible in the first place. From a Gadamerian viewpoint, the ethnocentric idea of truth as ‘validity-for-us’ is insufficient for ensuring the openness of understanding towards other, radically different horizons and thus for enabling such expansion of our community of justification that Rorty himself also advocates. As Dostal (1987, 424) notes, the assumption of the shared world is the bridge that makes possible the conversation of mankind that Rorty, in his own way, would like to promote. Habermas (1998b, 375) also makes a similar point as he suggests that, as soon as the regulative notion of truth is eliminated in favour of a pragmatic validity-for-us, the rational motive to seek agreement beyond the boundaries of one’s own community is missing. In other words, without a regulative truth concept, there would be no motivation to enter into dialogues with representatives of other cultures or paradigms, to take their claims seriously or to allow one’s own beliefs to be tested in the process.

Therefore, although Gadamer also suggests that understanding is always applicative and thus necessarily motivated by certain questions and interests of a particular horizon, his point is not to say that understanding is only answerable to these interests and concerns. Rather, Gadamer (2004, 298–299) argues that it is pivotal for our ability to learn and transform – in Rortyan terms, to be *edified* – that we subject ourselves to dialogues with horizons and perspectives that place into question our initial viewpoints and criteria. It is also central that we take the arguments of our dialogue partners to be genuine claims of truth about the subject matter, which can potentially illuminate something about this matter that we did not ourselves know. Therefore, from a Gadamerian perspective, the pursuit of truth in which we are engaged cannot be identified with the Rortyan pursuit of intersubjective agreement among the members of one’s own community, even if this involves the hypothetical idea that one’s community of justification can be enlarged (Rorty, 1991b, 38).²²

In my view, these differences between Rorty’s and Gadamer’s philosophies are particularly crucial from the perspective of the philosophy of science. Rorty (1991b, 39) also advocates the idea of scientific research as a pursuit of “unforced agreement” and “free and open encounter”. However, if Rorty’s ethnocentric ideas were to prevail, it is difficult to understand what would motivate scientists

²² In some connections, Rorty (e.g. 1995, 283) speaks of the “cautionary use” of the concept of truth to point out that justification is relative to an audience and therefore we cannot exclude the possibility that there is some audience to which the belief that is currently justifiable to us would not be justifiable. As Misak (2010, 38) points out, this “cautionary use” of the concept of truth runs counter to the earlier Rortyan view that assimilates truth to justification. Misak (ibid.) argues that the “cautionary use” of the concept of truth ultimately leads to a thought that Rorty is “loathe to accept”, as it points to something towards which we aim that goes beyond what seems right to us here and now.

to test their theories or to seek agreement beyond the paradigms and theories that they currently hold.²³ From a Gadamerian perspective, it is precisely the pursuit of truth regarding the common world or a given subject matter, accompanied by an awareness of the finitude and fallibility of knowledge that secures the openness of scientific communities and thus also enables the expansion of knowledge. Adopting a hermeneutical perspective on the natural sciences evidently means accepting that even the sciences do not have an unmediated access to the world-in-itself. However, this hermeneutical awareness does not mean denying the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the world. Rather, it means acknowledging that this knowledge is mediated, perspectival, limited and correctible. Consequently, as I suggest in study III, obtaining a hermeneutical orientation to the natural sciences indicates a commitment to the idea of *fallibilism* as a guiding principle of scientific research (Leiviskä, 2013). As I further suggest in the study, the idea of fallibilism is already encoded within the natural sciences themselves and, therefore, incorporating hermeneutical insights into the philosophy of science does not contrast with the ideas already endorsed within the natural sciences (ibid.). Instead, Gadamer's hermeneutics can be perceived as providing a more nuanced understanding of the hermeneutical conditions underlying scientific fallibilism (ibid.).

Unlike for Rorty, for Gadamer the primary problem regarding the modern sciences is not the quest for objectivity and knowledge or even the use of the scientific method. Rather, Gadamer's concern – which I only briefly touch upon in the concluding part of study III – is the way this rather narrow field of knowledge possessed by the modern sciences has become the predominant form of knowledge within modern societies (Gadamer, 1981b, 72–73). From Gadamer's viewpoint, there is nothing wrong with the ideal of objectivity or the use of the scientific method as long as they remain within the sphere of the natural sciences. It is only when these ideals and methods pervade areas to which they are profoundly foreign – such as the human sciences – that they become potentially distortive of knowledge. Namely, in Gadamer's view, the mode of knowledge characteristic of the human sciences is the practical knowledge of 'the good life', which cannot be attained through the use of authorized methods, but rather through such processes of understanding that Gadamer himself describes (Gadamer, 1981d, 114–117). The purpose of understanding is ultimately to help us toward a conception of the good life to

²³ Evidently, also for Rorty there are certain pragmatic criteria based on which old theories should be replaced with new ones. These criteria have to do with the efficacy of scientific theories as means of prediction and control. However, as scientific theories are always underdetermined by data and facts, Rorty's pragmatic view fails to explain why rival theories both supported by the evidence at hand should strive for a common understanding of the world.

which also the sciences, in a broad sense, should be answerable (Gadamer, 1981a, 11–12). Hence, according to Gadamer, the primary problem with modern sciences is that their methodical orientation guided by a technical interest has become predominant in the human sciences and thus replaced the quest for practical knowledge.

Hence, although Gadamer's philosophy begins with similar postfoundational premises as Rorty's neopragmatism, Gadamer's hermeneutics has much less dramatic consequences for scientific research, as it does not deprive such inquiry of its ultimate motivation or label this inquiry as misguided. This difference between Gadamerian hermeneutics and Rortyan neopragmatism is not only important from the viewpoint of the philosophy of science, but also from the perspective of science education. Namely, in the field of science education, there has recently been a growing interest in the 'human factors' – that is, the social, historical, linguistic and political features – involved in scientific research and science education. However, this interest has also given rise to a legitimate concern that some approaches, postmodernist stances in particular, overemphasize these 'human factors' to the extent that leads to a dramatic distortion of science to a form unrecognizable to many (Loving, 1997, 435; Schulz, 2007, 635).

The benefit of applying Gadamer's hermeneutics to the field of science education is precisely that it allows acknowledging the hermeneutical (historical and linguistic) features of scientific research and science education without jeopardizing the motivation or legitimacy of these disciplines (Leiviskä, 2013). From a Gadamerian perspective, the aim of science education is to foster a genuine desire for knowledge in learners which, however, must be accompanied by an understanding of the fundamental fallibility and infinite perfectibility of both scientific knowledge and one's own understanding of the world (Gadamer, 1998b, 68–69). In study III, I refer to this orientation as fallibilistic and radically non-dogmatic (Leiviskä, 2013). As the aim of science education, such orientation eschews the narrow, calculative and technical attitude sometimes associated with natural scientific research, which is also the attitude that Gadamer himself was constantly concerned about. Namely, through cultivating a desire for truth and simultaneously demonstrating how our knowledge of the world is fundamentally finite and limited, hermeneutic science education prevents learners from perceiving the world as a mere controllable object.

Such hermeneutical orientation to science education also shuns the Rortyan pragmatic idea that sciences only serve the local goal of finding better ways of coping. Moreover, it is also in contrast with the Rortyan ethnocentric implication that the knowledge that sciences produce is ultimately justifiable only to a community of like-minded researchers. Although Rorty (1991b, 41) also suggests that we should remain open to other, better suggestions, the motivation underlying such openness is fundamentally different than in Gadamer's

hermeneutics. Namely, it is not driven by the desire to know the world or the truth of the subject matter, which for Gadamer motivates our unending processes of understanding and inquiry. Instead, it is oriented by a much more local and ethnocentric concern for finding ways of adjusting that better serve the current purposes of one's own community. Such a pragmatic interest does not necessarily secure the openness and non-dogmatism of scientific research or, more importantly, provide *knowledge* of the world in the sense intended by Gadamer. Namely, as Dostal (2012, 61) suggests, from Gadamer's perspective, although our knowledge of the world is always perspectival and partial, it is nevertheless knowledge based on our sincere attempts to understand the truth of the world through our dialogues with others.

5 BEYOND MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

In this chapter, my aim is to draw together the central findings of the three studies of this thesis as well as the findings presented in chapter 4. I also introduce some new insights in order to provide responses to the comprehensive research questions of this thesis. In chapter 5.1, I summarize the central findings regarding Gadamer's relationship to Habermasian modernism and the postmodernist philosophies of Caputo and Rorty, focusing particularly on Gadamer's concepts of dialogical rationality and the truth of the subject matter. In chapter 5.2, I examine the relevance of these findings to the philosophy of education. In particular, my aim is to demonstrate that Gadamer's philosophy circumvents some of the philosophical problems and limitations associated with the modernist and postmodernist philosophies of education and therefore it might offer a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by these standpoints. Finally, in chapter 5.3, I discuss some of the limitations of the studies and introduce possibilities for future research.

5.1 The central findings of the studies

As the findings of the three studies indicate, Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be unproblematically classified as either 'modern' or 'postmodern'. Rather, as I have demonstrated, Gadamer's philosophy is engaged in an attempt to redefine the concepts of rationality, knowledge and truth in a manner that departs from foundationalism and objectivism without, however, trivializing or relativizing these notions. In this sense, as Richard Bernstein (1983, 1986) among others has shown, Gadamer's philosophy significantly contributes to the movement beyond such dichotomies as modernism-postmodernism and objectivism-relativism.

Gadamer's concept of dialogical rationality introduced in study II is an example of such contribution. In contrast to the Enlightenment notion of rationality, Gadamer outlines an idea of situated reason that is embedded in the dialogical structure of language use (Leiviskä, 2015a, 2015b). As I argue in study II, dialogical rationality is a postmetaphysical (in a Habermasian sense) and a postfoundational conception of reason (Leiviskä, 2015b). This means, among other things, that such reason cannot subject the totality of tradition by which it is preconditioned to rational reflection at once nor have an unmediated, non-interpretative access to the world. What follows from this is that there is no neutral, language or tradition-independent foundation upon which 'true' or justified prejudices can be distinguished from 'false' or unjustified ones and thus all knowledge remains profoundly partial, fallible and open to revision in subsequent contexts of understanding.

However, in Gadamer's view, the situatedness of reason does not exclude the possibility of or the need for rational reflection. Gadamer has often been mistakenly interpreted as endorsing the view that understanding can merely illuminate and appropriate the prejudices pre-given to it and thus as downplaying the power of critical reflection. As I indicated in studies I and II, this was also the core argument of Habermas's critique of Gadamer (Leiviskä, 2015a, 2015b). As I hope to have illustrated, however, Gadamer's point is not to say that we should not try to justify our prejudices or that testing their validity is impossible because of our historical situatedness. Rather, one of Gadamer's major concerns in *Truth and Method* is the question of distinguishing the prejudices by which we understand from those that lead us to misunderstandings (Gadamer, 2004, 298). Gadamer's answer to this question is *dialogue*. Namely, although we cannot step out of our historical situatedness as a totality, we can test our prejudices in dialogical encounters with other historical horizons that present us with their independent claims of truth.

Richard Bernstein (1983, 168) argues that although Gadamer has introduced the concept of dialogue in order to explain how claims of truth can be validated, he fails to make this form of justification fully explicit. I agree with Bernstein that Gadamer's description of the criteria of a rational dialogue is far vaguer than it could be. In my view, however, this has to do with Gadamer's attempt to demethodize rationality. That is, he refrains from providing specific criteria of justification in order to avoid the impression that dialogue is a particular method or a technique at our disposal that can lead us to certainty or objectivity. However, as I have suggested, Gadamer nevertheless *does* give an explicit account of the features of a rational dialogue. Namely, he demonstrates that a genuine dialogue requires willingness to listen to the other's claim of truth, to accept it as a potentially valid claim regarding the subject matter and to test one's own prejudices against this claim. In other words, dialogue entails engagement in a reflective interplay of question and answer – of giving and asking for reasons – that is oriented by the mutual focus on the truth of the subject matter (*die Sache selbst*). My argument is that by outlining these features, Gadamer has given us a somewhat similar description of the procedural rationality inherent in our linguistic practices as Habermas has delineated with his concept of communicative rationality. The aforementioned features of dialogical rationality are thus such features that humans as linguistic beings rely upon in their attempts to understand each other and to justify their claims. Importantly, as Bernstein (1983, 163) correctly points out, through this description of dialogical rationality, Gadamer has also given us a powerful regulative ideal to orient our acts of understanding as well as our practical lives in a more general sense.

However, the concept of dialogical rationality should not be understood as an attempt to provide a transcendental or necessary foundation for our practices. Gadamer has continuously emphasized that philosophy must give up the idea of

an “infinite intellect” (Gadamer, 2004, 457) and “the role of prophet, of Cassandra, of preacher” (Gadamer, 2004, xxxiv). Gadamer (1981c, 90; 1998a, 60) is emphatic that philosophy itself belongs to the level of praxis and thus cannot dictate the rules or solve the problems of society and politics. This, in my view, is the central difference between Gadamer and Habermas – a difference that ultimately connects Habermas to foundationalism and Gadamer to postfoundationalism. Namely, although Habermas claims to have established a clear break with the tradition of transcendental philosophy and to have adopted a postfoundational orientation, as Apel (1992), Bernstein (1983) and McCarthy (1982) suggest, there is arguably a certain inconsistency in Habermas’s position. Habermas continuously insists upon the unavoidability and necessity of the counterfactual presuppositions of communicative action and thus appears to follow a stronger strategy of justification than he admits (Apel, 1992, 150). In other words, whereas Gadamer offers us a practice-immanent interpretation of the rational potential involved in understanding, Habermas’s continuous concern seems to be to demonstrate that this rationality is not only possible but also necessary in the sense that it cannot be refuted without performative contradiction (e.g. Habermas, 1990).

Gadamer’s concept of rationality can also be distinguished from the postmodern interpretations of reason involved in Caputo’s and Rorty’s philosophies. As indicated in the previous chapter, Rorty (1991a, 23) advocates an “ethnocentric” view of justification according to which there is nothing to be said about rationality besides the familiar procedures of justification of one’s own community. Against this ethnocentrism, Gadamer maintains that although dialogical rationality cannot be regarded as ‘foundational’, neither is dialogue a procedure of justification characteristic only of ‘our’ community. Rather, from Gadamer’s viewpoint, the possibility of dialogical justification is present wherever language is used, regardless of the communities to which the interlocutors belong. Therefore, the idea that we are only capable of justifying ourselves to the members of our *own* community is utterly foreign to Gadamerian thinking.

At first sight, Caputo’s postmetaphysical rationality appears to bear a greater degree of similarity to Gadamer’s hermeneutics, because Gadamer’s concepts of *phronesis* and dialogue can also be understood as attempts to redefine the concept of rationality from a postmetaphysical perspective. However, as I have demonstrated, Caputo (1987, 213) ultimately reduces rationality to “coping with the flux” by which he means the playful activity of disrupting existing paradigms and making unorthodox suggestions to them. One can rightly ask what makes such non-conformity to existing paradigms particularly *rational* and is conformity to established paradigms thus always necessarily *irrational*? Another central problem with Caputo’s notion of rationality is that it is ultimately just a negative attempt to demonstrate what reason is *not* and from

which reason should be liberated, rather than a constructive account of rationality. This desire to keep to negative descriptions is common among many postmodernist philosophies and, in my view, it significantly reduces their philosophical significance. Namely, what they lack is a positive alternative to the traditions, ways of thinking and arguments that these postmodern philosophies so rigorously criticize. Moreover, it is not clear whether Caputo's own concept of rationality is entirely free of principles. In his "ethics of dissemination", Caputo (1987, 261) invokes an idea of "fair play", which he defines as the "free play of ethicopolitical discourse, a kind of public debate in which we allow ethicopolitical reason to play itself out" (ibid.). He further suggests that "The essential thing, on this view, is to delimit the power of powerful interests and metaphysical ideologies to dominate the talk and arrest the play" (Caputo, 1987, 262). Is not Caputo here offering principles of rational debate or discourse very similar to those provided by Gadamer and Habermas? It seems, as Marsh (1992, 19) points out, that Caputo is caught in a dilemma of self-contradiction versus arbitrariness, where he either uses the kind of *ratio* he aims to avoid or his position is vulnerable to arbitrariness.

Another feature that distinguishes Caputo's and Rorty's philosophies from Gadamer's is the concept of *truth*. As I indicated in the studies, Gadamer sustains a regulative truth concept – that is, the truth of the subject matter or *die Sache selbst* – capable of giving direction and motivation to processes of understanding (Leiviskä, 2015b; see also Healy, 2007). However, as I argued in my defence against Caputo's critique of Gadamer, this concept of truth does not refer to some pregiven, ahistorical essence that is being transmitted in tradition through dialogical or dialectical processes of understanding. Rather, for Gadamer, the concept of the truth of the subject matter functions as a dialogical constraint directing and orienting dialogue partners by providing for them a common ground or an ideal reference point that prevents the dissolution of understanding into a mere juxtaposition between rival perspectives. From a Gadamerian viewpoint, such a concept is indispensable because without it understanding would lose its ultimate motivation. Namely, without an idea that truth is non-identical to what we currently find as valid *for us*, there would be no reason to take the claims of truth of others seriously, to risk our initial presuppositions in the encounters with other horizons or to expand our communities of justification. Hence, through rejecting such a regulative notion of truth, both Rorty and Caputo lose the critical potential that can be associated with Gadamer's hermeneutics.

However, as I hope to have demonstrated, although Gadamer maintains that truth is the (ideal) goal of all understanding, he does not mean that there is an ultimate, objective or foundational truth to be attained. Rather, Gadamer (2004, 444) insists that situated understanding can only grasp its objects as mediated by language and history and therefore as limited and partial. Nevertheless, part

of the originality of Gadamer's hermeneutics lies in the attempt to demonstrate that albeit historical, partial and limited, the interpretations generated by hermeneutical understanding are anything but trivial or insignificant. They are inadequate or secondary only from the viewpoint of the Cartesian desire for absolute certainty. Firstly, these interpretations represent the meaning of a given subject matter for the interpreter and his or her historical situation and thus they have existential rather than epistemological significance. That is, they open new horizons of meanings, enable new processes of understanding and thus represent a newfound freedom in what has previously been a limitation to the interpreter. Secondly, these interpretations also represent an advance in understanding in the sense that they have been formed through reflective dialogues in which one's prejudices have been tested against the views of other horizons. Therefore, they open deepened, enriched and more justified views into the matters at hand.²⁴

Gadamer's strong emphasis on the contextuality of understanding creates a certain tension between Habermas's and Gadamer's positions. As I have demonstrated, both authors agree that we need regulative ideals in order to secure the openness of understanding and to sustain the distinction between facticity and validity. However, whereas Gadamer's focus is on the historical, partial and finite nature of our existence, as Paul Fairfield (2011, 141) points out, Habermas still takes flight to a realm of strong idealizations and counterfactuals and aims to demonstrate what we 'could' agree, if we were not conditioned as we are. Consequently, whereas Gadamer emphasizes that it is the tendency to *search* for validity and truth rather than to *achieve* it that makes us rational and human, Habermas still seeks a method, an epistemology or a standpoint from which the justification of our factual agreements could be decided with formal certainty (Fairfield, 2011, 151; see also Healy, 2007, 139).

To summarize my arguments so far: Caputo and Rorty see no danger in associating the concepts of rationality and truth either with the procedures of justification characteristic of *our* community (Rorty) or with the constant flux of novel interpretations and paradigm shifts (Caputo). In contrast to this, Gadamer is persistent in sustaining a notion of dialogical rationality in principle recognizable to all human beings and a concept of truth that functions as a regulative ideal orienting processes of understanding. At the same time, however, Gadamer also preserves the firmly postfoundational orientation of his

²⁴ It is important to acknowledge, however, that Gadamer's emphasis on the contextual and situated nature of understanding does not mean that he endorses the Rortyan idea of understanding as merely self-interested or as serving only pragmatic interests. Rather, as Gadamer (2004, 311–312) highlights in his re-interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, understanding cannot be arbitrary either with respect to the subject matter or to the given context of interpretation. It is rather codetermined by both, as we can only understand and capture the meaning of some subject matter as mediated by our particular historical situation.

philosophy by giving up the attempt to establish an uncircumventable foundation for rationality. Thereby, Gadamer evades some of the inconsistencies encountered in Habermas's project, which have rendered questionable the postmetaphysical and postfoundational status of Habermas's philosophy. Hence, in my view, Gadamer's hermeneutics can be perceived as avoiding some of the philosophical limitations of both Habermasian modernism and Caputo's and Rorty's postmodern philosophies and thus as contributing to the movement beyond these approaches. In the following section, I discuss the significance of this interpretation of Gadamer for the philosophy of education and particularly for overcoming the problematic that has been associated with the modernist and postmodernist philosophies of education.

5.2 The relevance of the studies to the philosophy of education

In his book *The new Significance of Learning*, Pádraig Hogan (2010, 34–35) argues that education as a practice requires of the philosophy of education more than the postmodern critique of existing philosophical paradigms. Although the philosophy of education may involve such critique, it also has to include constructive suggestions of what a favourable, non-repressive educational practice would look like and what would be its central aims and its guiding ideals (ibid.). Moreover, as Marianna Papastephanou (2001, 293) suggests, any constructive suggestion, critique or intervention ultimately finds its justification in some understanding of rationality and truth. Namely, without such notions it is impossible to articulate what 'ought' to take place in educational practices or to prefer one educational model over another. Postmodern philosophies often withdraw from making constructive suggestions for fear of resembling once again the different forms of ontological and epistemological foundationalism that these philosophies initially aimed to distance themselves from. However, I agree with Hogan (2010) and Papastephanou (2001) that this withdrawal jeopardizes the educational value and significance of these philosophies. Namely, education as a practice is deeply intertwined with such questions as what we hope from the future society, what direction our humanity ought to take and what we can justifiably transmit to future generations. Therefore, leaving these questions unanswered and unanalysed is not a viable option for a philosophy of education that seeks to have practical relevance.

However, it has become clear that in constructing the desirable ideals, aims and ends of education, it is impossible to bypass the impact that not only postmodern philosophies, but also the postmodern condition of our society and culture has had on the way we perceive rationality and knowledge. Many of the 'grand narratives' of modernity are undeniably in crisis. They have been challenged by a new multiplicity of different identities, worldviews and value commitments, which place into question, for instance, the idea of a unified

process of rationalization and the conception of a universal or uniform mode of rationality. As I have demonstrated, even such modestly objectivistic projects as Habermas's theory of communicative action appear from this perspective as too idealized, relying on such assumptions that cannot be achieved from the position of a situated inquirer.

Hence, in my view, what the contemporary philosophy of education requires is a philosophical approach that provides such notions of rationality and truth from which education can derive its justification and direction and which also enable the philosophical critique of existing educational practices. At the same time, however, this approach must be able to take into account the limitations of rationality and knowledge that follow from the situated and context-dependent nature of human existence. In other words, such an approach would have to overcome the debility that follows from the relativization or trivialization of the concepts of truth and rationality without, however, compromising its postfoundational orientation. In this thesis, I have attempted to introduce Gadamer's hermeneutics as one possible alternative for a philosophical framework that might meet these requirements and, therefore, contribute to the movement beyond the modernism-postmodernism dichotomy within the philosophy of education.

As Bernstein (1983, 163) argues, Gadamer employs his notion of dialogical rationality as a regulative ideal or a vision of a society in which there is a practical attempt to overcome such forms of communication and practice that prevent the realization of the rational potential of humanity. My suggestion is that the concept of dialogical rationality could, in a similar vein, function as a regulative ideal and as a justificatory basis for educational practices. The notion of dialogical rationality represents a form of practical philosophizing or practice-immanent theorizing and thus it can be understood as clarifying and explicating the rational features that are already embedded within our educational practices. Hence, if educators and learners themselves recognize and accept dialogical rationality as the inherent *rationale* of education – and the society in which such rationality flourishes as their orienting ideal – the concept can be perceived as providing an interpretation of the inherent *telos* of educational practices. Such an interpretation provides educators with a guideline upon which to construct and based on which to evaluate their actions and modes of conduct as educators. It can also inform and remind practitioners of the aims of education when educators themselves import such values, beliefs and intentions into education that are foreign to this practice and therefore cause distortions (e.g. Fairfield, 2011, 113). Moreover, the idea of dialogical rationality could help to make explicit those situations where distortive intentions, demands or aims are imposed on education from the outside. Therefore, this notion might not only provide an orienting ideal for educational practices, but also a point of departure for their philosophical reflection and critique. From this perspective,

the notion of dialogical rationality would allow the philosophy of education to sustain its critical potential and thus to avoid the debility that Carr (1998), Hogan (2010), Heyting (2004) and Papastephanou (2001) among others associate with some postmodernist philosophies of education.

However, as I have demonstrated, dialogical rationality is a fallible and correctible interpretation of the prospects of education and humanity and therefore it should not be identified with the foundationalist aspirations of some of the modernist philosophies of education introduced in chapter 1.1. As Gadamer's (2004, 273) critique of the Enlightenment indicates, the attempt to establish a secure foundation for knowledge and rationality is in contrast with the prejudiced nature of understanding and with the historical character of human existence. Moreover, as Gadamer (1999, 36) argues in his essay "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics", the only valid form of philosophy or philosophical ethics is one that does not deny its own conditionedness but rather takes its conditionedness or questionableness as one of its essential contents. In this context, Charles Taylor's (2015, 62–63) distinction between "strict dialectics" and "interpretative dialectics" might be helpful for illuminating the difference between foundationalist epistemologies and the more modest form of justification or argumentation provided by Gadamer's hermeneutics. Whereas strict dialectics refers to a philosophical system that claims to rely on an undeniable starting point, interpretative dialectics remains in a hermeneutical circle and uses as its point of departure the interpretations that humans have of themselves and their practices (Taylor, 2015, 62–63). However, although interpretative dialectics does not assume an Archimedean point of knowledge, it still aims to convince us by means of reasoned arguments or, as Taylor (2015, 63) himself puts it, by the overall plausibility of the interpretation that it gives. Gadamer's hermeneutics is an excellent example of such mode of argumentation or reasoning that is oriented to exercising reasoned judgment not in the context of the timeless and unchanging, but of the variable and contingent.

Hence, although the concept of dialogical rationality might be able to provide education with an orienting ideal and a point of departure for the philosophical critique of educational practices, it evidently does not eliminate the fact that these practices are profoundly effected by history. However, as I hope to have demonstrated, being historically effected does not prevent the critique of educational practices or exclude the possibility of a productive transformation of tradition through education. Rather, it means that education lacks the kind of self-transparency that would enable full control over the ideas, practices, skills and orientations transmitted through education to future generations. The historicity of education thus requires of educators that they recognize the partiality and finitude of their outlooks and actions and aim to equip the learners with such abilities that enable them to become active participants in the reasonable reinterpretation of tradition. In my view, adopting dialogical

rationality as the orienting ideal of educational practices thus ultimately means fostering such dialogical, situated rationality or *phronesis* in learners themselves and thereby allowing them to take part in the desirable transformation of tradition and society.

In studies I and III, one of my primary aims was to describe the learning processes based on dialogical, *phronetic* rationality (Leiviskä, 2013, 2015a). In these processes, the learners acquire a reflective perspective on the tradition that they inherit through education and thus on the very presuppositions that orient their learning. In Gadamer's (2004, 301) words, they obtain "effective historical consciousness". As stated earlier, because of the historicity of human existence, attaining such a critical perspective requires encountering other, previously unknown horizons and worlds of thought and action. Through their unfamiliarity and unexpectedness, these horizons give rise to such experiences of negation that allow the learners to foreground their own historical presuppositions, to examine their historically structured nature and to gain awareness of the finitude and fallibility of their prevailing knowledge. This awareness results in the increased openness of learners to other horizons and thus to further experiences.

However, as I have emphasized, encountering other horizons and learning from them does not mean unquestioningly accepting the claims of truth of these horizons. Rather, it means entering into a common, dialogical search for truth with them and testing one's own presuppositions against the truth claims that these horizons present. In other words, learning requires sacrificing one's current partiality for the sake of the truth of the subject matter and reaching beyond one's current being towards greater universality (Gadamer, 2004, 15). This kind of learning gives rise to new, more justified, enriched and deepened interpretations of the subject matters in question and it also opens for the learner new horizons of meaning and new possibilities of understanding. However, these interpretations achieved in learning will inevitably be overcome by subsequent processes of learning, as the learner's horizon expands and shifts as he or she understands and learns. For Gadamer, learning is therefore not a process of approaching a pre-given or pre-existent truth or full autonomy from historical prejudices. Rather, processes of learning must be regarded as fundamentally open-ended and unfinishable, as no interpretation of any subject matter is ever an exhaustive or a final one, but there is always more to learn and experience. Gadamer (2004, 8) himself refers to these unfinishable learning processes with the notion of *Bildung*. The essence of this Gadamerian concept, in my view, is that it is the never-ending *pursuit* of truth and knowledge that makes us human, not the discovery of truth itself, as the latter remains an unattainable ideal for finite human existence. However, unlike Caputo, Rorty and many other postmodern philosophers suggest, despite its unattainability, truth remains a necessary guiding ideal for processes of learning, as giving up

such an ideal would ultimately mean giving up the rational motivation to overcome one's current partiality.

From a Gadamerian perspective, engaging in the kind of learning processes described above is crucial as it prepares the learners for such citizenship upon which open, tolerant and dialogical societies are based. These societies are those in which a continuous practical attempt exists to realize the features involved in dialogical rationality – features such as openness to communication and learning, willingness to offer and receive criticism and to test one's convictions against opposing values and opinions (Fairfield, 2011, 150). However, as Fairfield (*ibid.*) indicates, adopting a hermeneutical perspective on rationality and society means accepting that actual, historical conditions always remain far from the ideal. Therefore, the discursive or dialogical practices of even the most open and reasonable societies are not only symmetrically structured and oriented to reciprocity, but also agonistic, rhetorical, persuasive and power-seeking (*ibid.*). Human praxis never reaches the ideal state of complete rationality or reasonableness. However, from a Gadamerian viewpoint, this makes the continuous practical attempt to realize such rationality even more important.

As a conclusion, I suggest that Gadamer's hermeneutics opens an illuminating philosophical perspective on education as a practice that is deeply concerned about the future and the prospects of humanity and ultimately about the 'good' of human life. Therefore, Gadamer's hermeneutics also allows recognizing that education requires cogent conceptions of rationality and truth from which to derive its justification and orientation and upon which to base the philosophical critique of educational practices. However, as a profoundly historical, practice-immanent mode of theorizing and philosophizing, Gadamer's hermeneutics does not seek to provide a *foundational* justification for educational practices. What philosophical hermeneutics provides is a historical, fallible and correctible interpretation of the inherent rational potential of education and learning – an interpretation that seeks to convince us by the overall plausibility that it gives (Taylor, 2015, 63). The relevance of this interpretation is that it might help the educators and learners themselves to reflect upon their actions and beliefs in different educational contexts and settings and thus to participate in the continuous betterment of their practices.

In the light of the focus of this study, however, the primary significance of this Gadamerian interpretation is that it represents an important contribution to the movement beyond the unproductive modernism-postmodernism opposition within the philosophy of education. Namely, while Gadamer's philosophy refrains from the foundationalist aspirations of the modernist philosophies of education, it also avoids the kind of debility that has been associated with the withdrawal of the postmodernist approaches from providing a justificatory basis for educational practices. In this sense, Gadamer's

hermeneutics offers a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by either the modernist or the postmodernist philosophies of education discussed in this thesis.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

In this chapter, I discuss some of the limitations associated with this thesis – particularly with its scope and perspective – and also outline some directions for future research. One of the limitations has to do with the focus of this work on the modernism-postmodernism debate. Namely, adopting this debate as my framework inevitably restricted my examination to certain epistemological features of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, thus leaving some other important dimensions of his philosophical project in the background. These dimensions involve, among other things, the ontological and ethical aspects of the concept of understanding. Namely, for Gadamer, understanding is not only a mode of justification, but also an ontological mode of being and a way of relating to the world and other people. When perceived from an ontological perspective, the process of understanding appears even less controllable and subject-centred than from an epistemological viewpoint. When Gadamer (2004, 484) speaks in the ontological tenor, he emphasizes the way we are “drawn into” an event of tradition and language which rather “plays itself” than is played by its participants. Perceived ontologically, understanding is therefore something that “happens to us over and above our wanting and doing”, as Gadamer (2004, xxvi) puts it. Moreover, the relevance of the ‘other’ in Gadamer’s hermeneutics is not restricted to the role given to this other in a justificatory dialogue. Rather, as Gadamer (2004, 354) states, in a dialogue two people are bound together by a “moral bond” or a dialectical reciprocity. This bond is based upon the profound recognition of the otherness of the other and of the possible legitimacy of the other’s claims. According to Gadamer (2004, 292), only such bond and reciprocity between two people ultimately enables the “miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning”. Illuminating these ontological and ethical dimensions of understanding was beyond the current focus of this thesis and therefore their examination remains a task for future research.

Another issue closely related to the modernism-postmodernism distinction is the objectivism-relativism dichotomy that appears on the pages of this thesis. Due to the restricted space, I was not able to properly address the difficulties and ambiguities associated with these concepts in the context of study II where these notions are particularly employed (see Leiviskä, 2015b). The use of these concepts is evidently not always problematic or misleading – however, it is important to acknowledge that there are different forms and varying degrees of both objectivism and relativism. For instance, both Caputo and Rorty reject the

version of relativism that takes every belief to be as good as any other and Rorty additionally refutes such relativism according to which the notion of truth has as many meanings as there are procedures of justification (Caputo, 2013; Rorty, 1991a, 23; 1993, 328). However, both of these philosophies are relativistic from the viewpoint of Bernstein's (1983, 8) definition, which associates the concept of relativism with the kind of postfoundationalism that accepts the incommensurability of different language games. Moreover, as I demonstrated in studies I and II, from a more 'objectivistic' perspective, Gadamer himself can be perceived as representing a form of relativism (Leiviskä, 2015a, 2015b). Namely, among other things, from a Gadamerian perspective, interpretations can be justified only against other particular interpretations instead of by appealing to some ahistorical or tradition-independent principles or foundations. One important viewpoint on the concept of relativism is also presented by Bernstein (1983, 19) and Fairfield (2011, 228). According to them, relativism remains a plausible category only from the perspective of a Cartesian absolutist who maintains that certain, indubitable knowledge is possible. If, however, we accept the hermeneutical standpoint and give up the quest for certainty, relativism ceases to appear as a major threat, because all knowledge then becomes more or less uncertain, fallible and partial (*ibid.*). This last insight is perhaps also the reason why Gadamer himself remains somewhat indifferent in regard to the threat of relativism.

The concept of objectivism – that is, the idea that there is some permanent, ahistorical framework to which we can appeal in determining the nature of such concepts as rationality and truth (Bernstein, 1983, 8) – also raises some problematic, especially when it is used to refer to Habermas's philosophical programme. Namely, although Habermas declares himself to be a modernist, he nevertheless argues to have built his philosophy upon strictly postfoundational and fallible premises (e.g. Habermas, 1984, 1990). It is evident that Habermas's philosophy can be distinguished from the forms of objectivism such as Cartesian absolutism or Kantian transcendentalism in its original sense. Nevertheless, as I have argued, several critical reviews of Habermas's philosophy have made explicit the internal contradictions of his philosophical programme and thus raised the question whether his philosophy can be regarded as genuinely postfoundational (Apel, 1992; Bernstein, 1983; McCarthy, 1982). From this viewpoint, Habermas can be argued to endorse at least a weak or a modest form of objectivism in a Bernsteinian (1983, 8) sense. In fact, as Bernstein (1983, 12) rightly points out, this kind of weak objectivism remains the only plausible form of objectivism in contemporary philosophy because "the dominant temper of our age is fallibilistic". The viable option for us is thus between a sophisticated form of fallibilistic objectivism and a nonsubjective conception of relativism (*ibid.*).

Addressing these issues here is important because particularly relativism has – perhaps for the wrong reasons – become a slogan for 'bad philosophizing' and

the concept is too often utilized to label entire philosophical programmes as unproductive or disadvantageous. Therefore, it is important to aim towards philosophical language use that relies less upon such conceptual dichotomies that potentially give a misleading image of the philosophical field and the differences between the rival philosophical approaches. Hence, one prospect for future research concerns the further examination of the possibility of overcoming the binary distinctions between modernism and postmodernism as well as objectivism and relativism. Surpassing these distinctions requires finding new ways of describing the differences in emphasis between the philosophical approaches. Moreover, it involves understanding in a different way such philosophically central concepts as rationality, truth and knowledge. Gadamer's philosophy can indeed itself be understood as a form of such overcoming. Namely, Gadamer (2004) emphasizes that the concepts of rationality, truth and knowledge that he introduces in his philosophy have a quite different meaning and significance than the understanding of these notions established in the tradition of the Enlightenment and in the modern sciences. In Gadamer's philosophy, these concepts primarily relate to the way in which we as human beings experience the world, learn from each other and thus become transformed in the process. Although I have already illuminated these dimensions of Gadamer's philosophy in the studies and thus contributed to the movement beyond the ambiguous conceptual distinctions described above, there is still more work to be done in this area. "Interpretation is always on the way", as Gadamer (1981c, 105) himself states.

Another significant prospect for future research concerns the educational implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Namely, although the educational contributions of the studies of this thesis illuminate important aspects of the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics to the philosophy of education, forming a unified educational approach or a comprehensive hermeneutical theory of education on the basis of Gadamer's philosophy requires further development of the themes introduced in the studies. Particularly Gadamer's later developments based on his reappropriation of Aristotelian practical philosophy could open fruitful possibilities for illuminating the social and political dimensions of Gadamer's philosophy and for elucidating the relevance of these dimensions to the philosophy of education. Another interesting possibility concerns the issue of hermeneutic *teaching*. An important undertaking for future research is to decipher what kind of teaching is appropriate when the aims of education are understood in terms of Gadamer's concepts of *phronesis* and dialogical rationality and whether there are – or even can be – any philosophically determinable methods or techniques of teaching for furthering these aims. Namely, Gadamer (e.g. 2004, xxv) has continuously emphasized that his endeavour is to explicate the conditions of understanding rather than to elaborate methodical procedures. This implies that his hermeneutics does not

necessarily provide a straightforward model for developing an account of hermeneutic teaching. Furthermore, especially in his writings on practical philosophy, Gadamer (1998a, 59) emphasizes that it is not the task of philosophy to find the correct means for achieving certain ends, but rather both discovering these means and justifying the ends ultimately remains a task for the practitioners themselves.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine the potential of Gadamer's hermeneutics to contribute to the overcoming of the unproductive modernism-postmodernism dichotomy in the philosophy of education. Furthermore, the study also attempted to elucidate the possibility of Gadamer's hermeneutics to offer a more defensible warrant for educational theory and practice than that provided by the modernist and postmodernist philosophies of education discussed in this thesis. As indicated earlier, providing such a warrant requires responding to both a) the modernist demand for cogent notions of rationality and truth; and b) the postmodernist requirement to take into account the inescapable contextuality of rationality and knowledge. The aforementioned aims were pursued in the study by examining Gadamer's hermeneutics in relation to some of the prominent representatives of modernism and postmodernism and by establishing that Gadamer's philosophy succeeds in overcoming some of the major philosophical problems and limitations associated with these stances. The approaches studied were Jürgen Habermas's modernist critical theory and John Caputo's and Richard Rorty's postmodern philosophies. The study primarily focused on the Gadamerian concepts of dialogical rationality and the truth of the subject matter (*die Sache selbst*), which represent an attempt to redefine the notions of rationality and truth in a postfoundational and yet nonrelativistic manner.

The study suggested that the Gadamerian concept of dialogical rationality can be understood as representing a form of justification that is embedded within the dialogical structure of everyday language use and is thus in principle recognizable to all language users. The concept of dialogical rationality functions as a procedural criterion for testing and justifying historically constituted presuppositions and therefore this concept enables refuting – or at least significantly weakening – the charges of relativism and conservatism directed to Gadamer's hermeneutics. Moreover, through describing the inherent *telos* of language use towards understanding and agreement, this concept of rationality also gives a powerful regulative ideal to orient understanding and our practical lives in a more general sense.

It was argued in the study that the concept of dialogical rationality circumvents both the foundationalist tendencies encountered in Habermas's modernist philosophy and the postmodern trivialization of reason associated with Caputo's and Rorty's philosophies. Although there are significant similarities in Gadamer's and Habermas's concepts of rationality, while Gadamer's dialogical rationality is strictly postfoundational, the nature of Habermas's communicative rationality is much more ambiguous. Namely,

although Habermas argues to have rejected foundationalism, his indebtedness to strategies of justification characteristic of Kantian transcendental philosophy has been illustrated in many critical reviews of his philosophical project (Apel, 1992; Bernstein, 1983; McCarthy, 1982). The features of dialogical rationality described above also distinguish this concept from Caputo's and Rorty's understandings of rationality. From a Gadamerian viewpoint, Caputo's postmetaphysical view of rationality as nonconformism to established paradigms fails to explicate what makes such nonconformism particularly rational and how it prevents the arbitrariness of interpretation. Moreover, Rorty's ethnocentric concept of justification remains vulnerable to the radical incommensurability of different language games and it also problematically raises the mode of justification characteristic of one's own community over those of other cultures and societies.

Similar conclusions were drawn from Gadamer's concept of the truth of the subject matter (*die Sache selbst*). For Gadamer, this concept of truth represents a regulative ideal or a dialogical constraint orienting dialogical processes of understanding. It motivates the interlocutors to reach beyond their historically pregiven presuppositions and to test them in relation to the truth claims of others. This concept of truth thus prevents the dissolution of understanding into a mere juxtaposition between different interpretations. Although this Gadamerian truth concept bears a certain resemblance to the Habermasian idea of the context-transcending nature of validity claims, Gadamer nevertheless places a much stronger emphasis on the contextual and situated outcomes of factual processes of understanding. In contrast to Gadamer, Habermas sustains a strong dichotomy between factual discourses and ideal contexts of justification, thus contradicting the always already historically and linguistically embedded nature of understanding and argumentation. As for Caputo and Rorty, they reject the concept of truth as the ideal aim of inquiry. From Gadamer's perspective, this undermining of truth has undesirable consequences for understanding. Namely, without a regulative truth concept, understanding becomes vulnerable not only to arbitrariness but also to dogmatism as the inquirers lose their rational motivation to challenge their pregiven beliefs and convictions and to expand their communities of justification.

These findings were utilized in the study to illustrate the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics to the philosophy of education and, more specifically, to elucidate how Gadamer's philosophy might contribute to the overcoming of the philosophical problems associated with the modernist and postmodernist philosophies of education. Firstly, it was argued that Gadamer's concepts of rationality and truth can be understood as providing orienting ideals for education and learning and also as functioning as points of departure for the philosophical critique of educational practices. In this sense, Gadamer's hermeneutics avoids the debility often associated with the postmodernist

philosophies of education that refrain from making constructive suggestions concerning the aims and ideals of education and from providing a justificatory basis for educational practices. Secondly, however, it was suggested that Gadamer's concepts of rationality and truth are intimately interlinked with the awareness of the profoundly historical, situated and context-dependent nature of human existence. In this sense, these Gadamerian concepts cannot be identified with the modernist attempt to provide uncircumventable foundations for educational theory and practice. Rather, these concepts can be understood as fallible and correctible interpretations of the rational potential involved in the practices of education and learning. By explicating this potential and thus making it available for the practitioners' self-reflection, these concepts enable educators and learners to participate in the continuous betterment of existing practices and conditions. By redefining the educationally crucial concepts of rationality and truth from a postfoundational and practice-immanent perspective, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics thus also avoids the major philosophical difficulties associated with the foundationalist aspirations of the modernist philosophies of education. The conclusion drawn from these findings was that Gadamer's hermeneutics succeeds in offering a stronger, more defensible justification for educational theory and practice than that provided by either the modernist philosophies of education or the postmodernist educational standpoints addressed in this study. Thereby, Gadamer's hermeneutics contributes to the movement beyond the unproductive modernism-postmodernism debate in the philosophy of education.

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